The Novels of Richard Pryce

Christopher
Jezebel
The Burden of a Woman
Elementary Jane
Time and the Woman
David Penstephen
The Statue in the Wood
Romance and Jane Weston

ROMANCE AND JANE WESTON

By RICHARD PRYCE

ALL who have been charmed by the subtle insight and pungent humor of "David Penstephen," "The Statue in the Wood," and "Christopher" will find even greater enjoyment in "Romance and Jane Weston," a vividly told story of a woman's experiences in leaving the seclusion of the Welsh hills for the crowded life of London.

Of Mr. Pryce the *New York Tribune* has said: "A writer with a gift for satire, a sense of humor, and a smooth mastery of the technique of the modern novel, a capital analyst, also, of character, and, last but not least, an Englishman as thoroughly at home in the English country house and among its denizens as Mr. Galsworthy himself"; and the *London Athenæum:* "Mr. Pryce's work recalls the style of Octave Feuillet by its clearness, conciseness, and brilliancy of touch. He is realistic in the true sense, and has steeped himself in the subtle charm of London, which he reproduces rather than describes."

Boston HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY *New York*

RICHARD PRYCE

Although "Christopher" is the only one of his books which is widely known in this country, Mr. Pryce is not a "new novelist." In England, he has been a successful writer for many years, and the books now published in America are not the amateur attempts of a budding genius but the ripe products of a quick mentality and a carefully trained talent. "Perceptivity," one might say if asked to name the author's leading characteristic, and a whimsical tolerance which is a natural accompaniment of keen insight. As a delineator of female character Mr. Pryce has no superior. He thoroughly understands woman nature and describes with equal facility all types in all circumstances. He has a happy faculty of setting his characters in surroundings peculiarly fitted to emphasize their individuality. Jezebel is expatriated among her own people; Elementary Jane keeps her simplicity in the artificial light of a London music hall; Mary Redwing clings to her standards in the midst of the narrow ideals of a little Welsh village. They are all superbly human.

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CHRISTOPHER.
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BY

RICHARD PRYCE

Author of "The Statue in the Wood," "David Penstephen" "Christopher," etc., etc.

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ROMANCE AND JANE WESTON

ROMANCE AND JANE WESTON

* * *

CHAPTER I

I

It was the persistent visits of one man (other things, of course, contributing) that sent her thoughts as persistently flying to the recollection of another, and of something which she would have said she had not only put out of her mind long ago, but forgotten. Actually, of course, she had done neither. She was Miss Weston. He was the Rector of the parish. The other man's name she did not even know — wherein was the rub; the insuperable obstacle; the first and the final reason for everything: for the breaking-off of what could not be said even to have begun, of what, if it had begun, ought not to have had so much as the beginning of a beginning. She would not think of it, would *not*, and, the Rector gone, his imminent proposal once more parried, thought of nothing else.

She did not dislike Mr. Morgan. Indeed, she rather liked him. She had enjoyed his visits till, exactly two years after the death of his wife, his visits began to take a new air and to show a definite purpose. Even then, when, that is, she became aware of their purpose — as how could she not? — she was not altogether ill-pleased. It was always agreeable to your vanity to be wanted. But did she want anyone, and, if so, was Mr. Morgan exactly what she could conceive herself to want?

Did she want anyone?

Through the brown study into which she fell after Mr. Morgan's departure, she watched Ellen clear away the tea-things. A neat little thing, Ellen, a Shropshire girl, with demure eyes and many more strings to her bow than the two that coquettishly fastened her apron. Miss Weston's tolerant smile was often turned upon Ellen's confidences. Ellen, handing a dish, perhaps, or shaking a duster out of a window, would convey that another adventure had happened to her (where you would have thought that there was so little chance of adventure!), and Miss Weston's amused "Well, Ellen?" would release the story.

"The cheek of the young man, 'm — someone I'd never seen before. Looking over his shoulder, too, when I turned my head."

"Just so, Ellen. Very impertinent as you say. But why did you turn your head?"

"Well, 'm, I had to see if he was looking. Because of what he'd said as he passed — which I hadn't answered."

"And what had he said?"

"Some nonsense or other. I'm sure I took no notice. If I could tell him whether the gorse was still in blossom in these parts I think it was. As if he couldn't see for himself!"

"Ah, a botanist."

"I don't know about that, 'm. More like a clurk, 'm, I thought, though he hadn't a bicycle."

A bicycle was what generally brought a genteeler stranger to that out-of-the-way part of the world. You were a native or you came on wheels. Natives, you knew. Strangers had to arrive. But Ellen would have had adventures on a desert island.

Yes, other things certainly contributed — notably Ellen and the case of Ellen: the implications of that something which Ellen had so conspicuously and which she, her mistress, equally conspicuously had not, and yet for one brief moment had certainly seemed to have. Perhaps had? Was there not, after all, Mr. Morgan? Perhaps had? For how, like the Miss Lots with never a man in the neighbourhood — but, to be sure, Mr. Morgan! — could

she possibly know? That, in itself, if she had not already been thinking, would have supplied matter for thought. Mr. Morgan, then, against a perpetual background of Ellen. Adventures all the time, for Ellen (who, like Mary the immortal Housemaid of a song which in its day had reached even that back-of-God-speed) was in truth a 'magnet for the men'; and always, behind these, at least three solid and serious aspirants whom, it was to be feared, she played one against another at the pleasure of a veering will. For Ellen, like Mary, all the men, men, men; for her, Ellen's mistress, just Mr. Morgan and the memory of what ought to have been forgotten.

After Ellen had gone, Miss Weston continued to think. Just Mr. Morgan! Had any other woman in the world so restricted a choice? — so restricted an acquaintance? There were no country houses of any consideration in the immediate district, practically no neighbours.

Plas Llwyn, the one big place of that part of the country, was ten miles away. It belonged to Lord Barmouth, who had other places and came down only for shooting parties in the autumn. Lady Barmouth had called, it was true, and Miss Weston, hiring a conveyance, had returned the visit for her mother. There the matter ended. There were farmers; a

solicitor or two; the doctor and his family; a few nondescripts in the village. No, no neighbours to speak of. And it was only lately, in the light of Mr. Morgan's patent intentions, that she had become conscious of how unusual her circumstances must be. That, to be sure, had not always been so. Before her mother inherited the cottage and started the illness which, beginning soon afterwards, was to last for the better part of ten years, her circumstances had been no more unusual than those of anyone else. With her mother she had travelled a little and lived — always somehow in apartments or 'furnished houses' — at such places as Bath, or Leamington, or Cheltenham, where marriageable men do not notably abound, but where Jane — Miss Weston — had had, it is to be supposed, as good chances of attracting what men there were as other presentable but portionless girls. But she had not attracted them, or, if she had attracted one or two who had not been abashed by the amused tolerance with which, quite unconsciously it is possible, she regarded what was then looked upon as the dominant sex, they had not attracted her. 'Too jolly independent' may be said to have summed up the general male criticism of Bath, Leamington, and Cheltenham upon a rather self-contained, wholly humorous, quite good-looking young

woman. Then, isolated, her one adventure.

It had happened at Brighton, where she and her mother were staying in Regency Square. It had happened, as such things do happen, on the Pier. That in itself had had its part in the decision which she had so suddenly come to and which, at the bottom of her heart, she believed, with a sort of retrospective conviction, unshakable, dismiss the thought of it as she would, to have affected — potentially anyway — the whole course of her life. The inherited prejudices of generations had leapt to the surface and impelled her, forced her, to precipitate action. Someone you met on the Pier; someone who picked you up, or, worse, whom you picked up (on the Pier!); someone who without introduction scraped acquaintance with you — the idea was unthinkable! 'Pick up'! 'Scrape'! The very sound of the words! They were, however, the words you used, the words you had to use, in such a connection. She was Miss Weston, not a shop-girl, or a Pier-girl, or even an Ellen. (Luckier shop-girls? luckier seaside girls, uncompromisingly as you condemned them? — luckier Ellen? whom somehow you did not condemn at all, but frankly envied.) She was Miss Weston, however, with generations of circumspect self-respecting Westons behind her. No other course had been open to her. Yet there had

been the other course if she had really been strong enough — though strength of a very real kind had been required for the sudden course she had taken! There had been another course, and, if she had taken that, she knew, knew in her slim but well-covered bones, that she would not now have been Miss Weston with just a reluctant memory and a Hobson's choice of Mr. Morgan or no one at all!

Strange how minutely she remembered him — not Mr. Morgan. Mr. Morgan, substantial as he was, was shadowy compared with the unknown man, the stranger like Ellen's 'clurk,' whom she had seen once in her life, and by her own action was never to see again. Twelve years and, deny as she might, she remembered.

For once she would let herself remember. He was dark, and she had thought that she liked fair men. He was not tall, and she had thought men ought to be tall. He was thickset, and the man of her dreams — she had had her dreams as a girl, like every other — was slender. She could see him now as he sat in the sun, the breeze flapping his newspaper when he turned it. She could see the strong hands that held it, brown against the white of the paper, less brown, almost white, indeed, against the brown of his suit. She did not know which pleased her more, the brownness of them or the whiteness of them, but what pleased her most was

their look of firmness and strength. She looked away from them abruptly, conscious of their dangerous attraction for her — the hands of a stranger — and, in connection with them, of a painful and wholly unexpected clutch at her heart. What had come to her?

She returned to her book. This was Thomas Hardy's "Two on a Tower," which she was reading then for the first time, and in which, up to the moment when, glancing up from it, she had become aware of him, she had been absorbed. Even now, twelve years later, she could recapture something of the glow with which, during her stay in Brighton, she had read this particular book for the first time. Later readings, in the light of maturer judgment, may have modified her younger enthusiasm for it, but she would never forget the excitement with which, at her first introduction to it, she had lost herself (and somehow also found herself) in the story of the ill-fated loves of Lady Constantine and the young astronomer under the frightening mystery of the everlasting stars. What she associated with such coupled names as "Abelard" and "Héloïse," "Paolo" and "Francesca," "Paul" and "Virginia," bits of "Manon Lescaut," and, even, though altogether different, of "Madame Bovary" (much later, when she considered herself of an age at which she might

read what she chose!) set the same sort of chord vibrating in her. Perhaps an excitement already generated in her by the book played a part in her betrayal. . . .

He, meanwhile, was as yet quite unconscious of her. With her eyes on her book, she knew this, to a curious mixture of relief and regret. He looked up from his reading from time to time as people passed, and followed them sometimes with amused or interested eyes. She could see without looking. She herself never tired of watching the Brighton crowd — heterogeneous but always with one dominant factor, and, if she had known it, watched its movements with much the same amused and interested detachment. Was quite a like crowd to be seen anywhere else west of Suez? . . . such an opulence of bosom in its women, of diamond-ringed fingers in its men? Such dark-headed, almond-eyed Lalla Rookhishness in its children, such a flashing generally of eyes — and noses?

She read for some minutes, but without assimilating what she read. She could not bring her mind to bear upon the printed words. She had read the same paragraph three times. What ailed her? Never before had she been so acutely conscious of anyone as she was now of this stranger. She knew, without looking, when he moved. He put down his paper presently

and produced a book. She looked up at last from her own and glanced, not at him, but at the people near him, expecting she knew not what — some sign of quickened pulses in them also? She might have thought that a magnetism which affected her so strongly — a pull as of the moon on the tide — must, in one way or another, have affected all who came within the radius of its operation. No one else seemed affected by it at all. The two girls who sat in the chairs nearest to his — giggling girls, quite harmless probably, but not above exchanging provocative glances with the passers-by of the opposite sex — were plainly unaware of any disturbing forces soever. An elderly woman on his other side knitted placidly. She, it was clear, as impervious as they to a battery of the activeness of which she herself was aware in every fibre of her being. Others also, near by, manifestly as completely unaffected. For her then only? For her. That made what she was experiencing the more significant. It made what she was experiencing really significant. If for her only: an attunement . . . ?

But he was unconscious of her.

The flaw in that argument.

She was minded to get up and walk away — not because he was unconscious of her, but because her thoughts, the trend of her thoughts, everything to do with what was passing, vol-

untarily or involuntarily, through her mind, was ridiculous and quite unlike her. But she did not get up and walk away. It was someone else who now did this — the occupant of the chair on her right, who recognised and joined a friend in the perambulating throng. The chair remained vacant for some moments. Then, because it chanced to be rather better placed with regard to the sun than the one in which he had been sitting, and wholly, as she knew, *un*because of her (he, while she trembled, was still as ever entirely unaware of her), the unknown disturber of her serenity moved across to it and established himself beside her. She, while he settled himself in it, returned under throbbing eyelids to her book — returned to it with a desperate concentration and a frenzied, inward, voiceless prayer that her blood might not betray her. It did not. She felt it ebb from her lowered face. She had not made a fool of herself, and was not to do so. She was safe — saved? — outwardly cool and collected if, within, there were still active fires.

She knew the exact moment at which he on his part first became conscious of her. His consciousness of her came to him through her feet, as hers in a way had connected itself with his hands. She had what her mother — as proud of them as, quite frankly, she was herself — always called the 'Weston foot.' 'Your

father had the most beautiful foot I've ever seen in a man.' She, like Cinderella of the immortal glass slipper, had easily the prettiest feet of any company in which she might chance to find herself, and was accustomed, without ever displaying them unduly, or even duly, to seeing them admired. A vainer woman would have made play with them. She never did this, taking them (with possibly, however, a subtler vanity) for granted. But she saw to it religiously that they should be always perfectly shod.

He had seen her feet. From that moment she knew that he was conscious of her. . . .

Twelve years ago, and she remembered. It was as if the twelve years slipped from her as she remembered. She had been happy enough in those years, yet, as she thought of them, it seemed to her that she had slept through them. Slept through them and was waking? Only now was waking?

II

Not many women so solitary. But her solitariness had come to her so naturally that in a way she had scarcely noticed it. The actual cause was, of course, her mother's long illness — one of those obscure gentle ailments which, in the case of patients of another class, or even

of patients of her own class, fill, not uncheerfully, half the beds in Homes for the Incurable, wherever such institutions exist. It began gently the year after Jane's adventure and the unexpected move to Aberllwyn, ran its gentle, uneventful course for nine years and five months, and ended as gently as it had begun. In all this time Jane — Miss Weston, for there was no one but her mother to call her Jane — hardly ever went away. Bonds, it will be seen; but never were bonds lighter or less irksome. They were not irksome at all. If it took two lives to live one, Jane did not know it — or knew it but at rare intervals, and then only in relation to the forbidden dream of the might-have-been. She loved her bonds.

No, the years, if they had left her so oddly stranded, had not been unhappy. They had not been empty. They had been pleasant, easy, sheltered years, not even gravely shadowed by the acknowledged menace which hung over them. Some day her mother would die. But so would she, so would everyone. Meanwhile there was nothing to be done, no operation to be faced and submitted to — nothing worse, in fact, than a protracted invalidism which was unlikely to prove distressing, but from which recovery was very improbable. If her mother could bear her sentence cheerfully, she could. The changes that had come in the

course of the years had come so gradually as to be almost imperceptible. The wheeled chair, the sofa; not till the last few months the bed continuously. A cheerful garden, a cheerful drawing-room, a cheerful bedroom. Mrs. Weston had not only been uncomplaining, but, with her books and her needlework, her spirits unflagging, actively, if also passively, quite contented. Impossible to regard the years as other than happy.

The house from the first had been an unending source of delight to both of them. In it Mrs. Weston's cousin, its former owner, an old Anglo-Indian tired of the East, had lived the life more or less of a recluse. He had bought it on his retirement, and expended upon it the care and the affection which others might have lavished upon a wife or a child. He had happened upon it by chance, fallen in love with it at first sight, entered into negotiations with the proprietors next day, and, within a month, completed its purchase. Its very position, at the back, as it has been said, of Godspeed, which incidentally had caused it to lie empty for long enough to bring it within the scope of his modest purse, was an attraction in his eyes. It became the joy and the hobby of his declining years.

Jane Weston would never forget her own and her mother's first sight of it. Their delight had

been but the echo of his. He had seen it empty; they had seen it filled with the harvest of his years of discriminating, loving search. Everything was 'right.' The furniture, the china, the pictures preserved, and completed, rather than made, the essential atmosphere of the mellow, low-ceilinged rooms.

But, before the house itself, the excitement of the journey of discovery; and, before that, from the day of the arrival of the letter which had apprised Mrs. Weston of her unsuspected good fortune, weeks of excitement. Mother and daughter had set out from London, whither the proving of the will and the business, generally, connected with solicitors' offices and Somerset House, had taken them. Even the visits to Somerset House had been an excitement. For once, nothing depressing in a gloomy business. Her mother had hardly known, or considered that she had hardly known, her benevolent relation. Jane had not known him at all. Their hearts had warmed to him, but the personal note which invests such visits with melancholy was necessarily absent. It was inevitable that pleasurable emotions should predominate.

Paddington, then, on a bright morning of early summer saw the two set forth. The journey was sheer pleasure. Maidenhead, with its glimpse of the shining river; Oxford, with

its spires; Leamington, where they bought Banbury cakes; Warwick; Birmingham, with its smoky red-brick and uncompromising commercial activities; the fascinating darkened waste of the Black Country, slag, furnaces smouldering or active, with here and there a chimney crowned with flames; Wolverhampton, long, rather cheerless platforms; then the gradual lifting of the smoke as Staffordshire gave place to Shropshire . . . these, roughly, the salient impressions of a run that was familiar to them both as far as Shrewsbury. Thenceforth all was new to them. Neither of them had ever been in Wales. They looked out of the windows like children, and, like children, or sight-seers in Switzerland, say — negotiating, eager-eyed, the passes of the Saint Gothard or the Simplon — crossed the compartment from side to side to miss nothing that might be seen. No mountains yet, but an increasing hilliness. A steadily increasing hilliness. Presently, on their right as they journeyed, a higher hill, twin-peaked. A mountain? They would call it a mountain — the first. (The Breidden, when they came to know names — Welshpool's own mountain by right of view.) A few minutes later Welshpool. They were in Wales.

The glimpse of Powis Castle which they caught augmented their sense of pleasure.

Romance met them here with outstretched hands. Momentarily they were plunged back into days before trains, before coaches. Forden presently; Montgomery; Newtown. It was there the train began to climb. Also they had left the towns behind them.

A five-mile drive in an open wagonnette took them from the station to their new home. Their excitement, which had been growing, reached an ecstatic point at the bend of the road which brought it into view. The smiling little house. . . .

Memories, memories, one leading to another. But she was back on the Pier at Brighton.

From her feet to her face. That the stranger should wish to see the face that belonged to the owner of the feet was no more and no less than the most modest vanity could expect. She did expect it. She knew that she even wished it. Her immediate concern, always under the lowered eyelids, was how exactly he would engineer his purpose, if — but she had no real doubts — he had such a purpose. Not furtively she hoped; not too casually. Yet how else? His chair was so near to hers. He could not turn round deliberately, could he, and just look at her? That seemed impossible. That was nevertheless somehow what she believed he must do. Ought she not, then, to get up

and move away? She couldn't. Also she did not want to.

What was that? Only Ellen singing in the pantry. Where did she get her songs? Songs of decades and decades ago. Songs that were old, some of them, when her — Jane's — mother had been young. She knew this one — a favourite song with Ellen, though it must have dated from the sixties at least, and come down to her from grandmother or great-aunts:

"Oh, isn't it a pity such a pretty girl as I
Should be shut up in a nunnery to pine away and die?
No, I won't be a nun! No, I *won't* be a nun . . ."

She, Miss Weston, could not hear the words through the intervening spaces of walls and passage, but she knew them and could fit them to the distant melody.

"No, I won't be a nun . . ."

She smiled to herself. No, that, certainly, Ellen would not! Wouldn't have to be, wouldn't be allowed to be. Ellen's songs, wherever she found them, or however she came by them, always somehow expressed her. The 'Oh, isn't it a pity' — wouldn't it be a pity, that is — and the 'Such a pretty girl as I' . . . how exactly 'right'! Incarceration, in connection with Ellen, unthinkable, monstrous! And, admitting an adventure, or, as now, insinuating herself into your conscious-

ness, sliding in between you and your memories on the lilt of an old song, how oddly, how very oddly, because so insistently and so persistently, Ellen did contribute! The discovery was arresting.

The result of the interruption was that Jane, of the memories, was whisked back from Brighton — leaving the stranger — to the house again. She and her mother welcomed at the door by Mrs. Williams — Missis Willyamce, the former owner's housekeeper — with curtsies and no resentment, and entering into their possession with little gasps and purrings of delight. Shining slippery dark oak and a smell of beeswax; these the first impressions of the mellow hall. The fanlight over the door. 'Look, Mother.' The slippery leisurely oak staircase with the broad grooved rail and the twisty bannisters. The slow tick of a grandfather's clock. A William and Mary chest-of-drawers on legs, with china, three Nankin bowls, a large one flanked by two smaller, on the top of it. Mrs. Williams opening the door — brass box lock with drop handles — of the drawing-room in which she was now sitting: the first sight of it . . . the first sight! How they had loved it! How she loved it still! How she would always love it! The secret of the strange solitariness of her life

was enclosed in the gracious friendliness of its four white panelled walls. How could one be lonely in such a haunt of ancient peace? The sun streaming in through the three tall, narrowish windows with the bookshelves between, just as it was streaming in now. You did not know what to look at first, the view from the windows, a deep fall into the valley backed by hills that you could call mountains, with veritable mountains behind them — Plinlimmon? Cader Idris? — or the treasures in the room itself. She was to grow accustomed to views, but never to lose the feelings with which they inspired her. She and her mother went to the windows, to each of the windows in turn.

"It's wonderful, Mother."

"Wonderful, Jane."

Mrs. Williams appeared to call the hills 'banks' — perhaps even the mountains. She stood smiling in the background. She came from Aberdovey herself, and said they should see the Happy Valley. 'There was grand it was at Aberdovey, an Aberystwith — with bands' ('bahnds' — something like that in the broadness of the vowel) 'across the estu-erry. There was the Col-lege too at Aberystwith and crowds of visitors in the sum-mer. It was very qui-et here in Aber-llwyn.'

Jane and her mother, under the spell as they

were of the house and what they saw from its windows, were assuredly to learn that Aberllwyn was 'very qui-et.' But in their delight with everything they had no fear of quiet. The remoteness of the district occasioned them no misgivings — rather, as in the case of their self-sufficing relation, did it seem an attraction in their eyes.

Mrs. Williams withdrew, to see, with the help of their Jehu, to the disposal of their luggage and to get tea. Mrs. Weston followed her to the door.

"One minute, Mrs. Williams. Will you settle with him? How much will it be?"

"The master always had it put down, 'm."

"Very well. Then for himself. Will you give him this?"

"Oh, too much, indeed. Half that, 'm. Plenty."

"Well, you know best."

Far from the madding crowd? Who wanted the madding crowd?

While their luggage bumped its way to their rooms, Jane tried the piano. The piano was probably the only modern thing in the room.

"Piece by piece, do you think? Thing by thing? Did he make no mistakes?" Mrs. Weston was pursuing her tour of inspection. Jane had joined her. They were standing before a walnut cabinet. The china on its shelves called forth the questions.

"None," Jane said. "If he did, or if he was doubtful, he discarded. I can imagine him only in the terms of Genesis."

You never had to say the whole of what you meant to Mrs. Weston.

"'Saw that it was good,'" she said now, smiling. . . . "'And the evening and the morning . . .'"

"More than six evenings and six mornings in his case. And when he rested he had finished his labours."

"We must get china books — furniture books. We must learn to know . . . to identify as he did. Years of study before us. I don't believe there's a thing wrong."

They were still exploring when Mrs. Williams brought in tea.

They had seen only the drawing-room — the hall on the way to it — and there was the rest of the house. But first tea.

Fresh delights, but delights that were no longer surprises; the cups and saucers, the teapot, the slender spoons.

It was almost a relief to turn to the business of eating and drinking. They were more than ready for their tea. There were hot cakes, there was home-made bread, there was honey in the honeycomb.

When they had finished their tea, they con-

tinued their explorations. A window on the stairs gave them the same view as that from the windows of the drawing-room, but from a different angle. Trees, hills, mountains, the placid valley; above a clump of trees a church tower which the drawing-room windows did not command.

"Our parish church, no doubt," Mrs. Weston said. The first unconscious stirring of Mr. Morgan; the first faint hint of the Morgan motif which was to become so familiar.

Mrs. Williams, hearing them on the stairs, came out of her kitchen to know if she should show them round, but Mrs. Weston, nodding and smiling, said they would find their way.

The doors of two rooms stood open. Mrs. Weston's luggage was in the first and larger room. She gave a little cry of delight at the sight of the four-post bed with the faded brocade hangings. Afterwards Jane was to remember that her first words on seeing it were that it was the sort of bed one would like to die in. Old Cousin James probably had died in it, Jane thought; but she was wrong, as she learned subsequently from Mrs. Williams. Colonel Tremlet had occupied the room at the end of the passage, which, for the sake of the dressing-room which was attached to it and into which he had fitted a bath, had appealed to him more. But actually, when she knew

the house better, she was to find that she was not less conscious of him in one room than another. His spirit if not his ghost — or his spirit as distinguishable from his ghost, for she would not have been surprised to meet his ghost in rooms and passages which breathed his spirit so palpably — was discernible everywhere.

"That tall-boy!" Mrs. Weston was saying ecstatically. "This dressing-table! The window-sills — you could sit and tuck up your legs. The fireplace! The fireplace makes one almost wish for the winter to see a fire glowing behind those looped bars, and between those gracious, useful hobs. I think of a nice black sooty kettle. But above all the bed, and the way it juts out into the middle of the room!"

Then Jane's own room, which was her room still, and the rest of the mellow delightful house.

"No, I won't be a nun . . ."

Ellen's voice through the walls and through her dreamings.

Not be a nun?

She, Jane, was a nun: the mellow, delightful house her cell and cloister.

And upon this her memories swooped back to Brighton.

Actually she spoke first. What she said was

only "Thank you," but in the light of 'pick up,' 'scrape,' Heaven alone knew into what distortion of the truth, or at least of values, the fact that she spoke first could or could not be twisted. Pick up, scrape . . . *accost?* To that utmost comic vulgarity? Not that. There were limits to what the most malignantly censorious, the most blindly prejudiced could say. But throw the handkerchief? By purest accident (under her calmness she was perhaps more nervous than she knew) her book, as she turned a page, had slipped from her knee. He had stooped and returned it to her. He could do no less.

So, by her indirect agency, the problem of how, exactly, he would achieve his purpose of looking at her, had solved itself. Accident had solved it for her and for him. She met a frank, steady look with a look as frank, as steady, and as unembarrassed, and, thanking him politely, took her book from his hand. She saw his hand at closer quarters as she did so, and again felt that strange stab at her heart.

The incident was over. They had seen each other. Now he or she would get up and go. She did not herself want to get up and go. On the contrary, she wanted him near her. She knew also that she wanted him to speak.

As she arrived at this, as in the resolving of a chord in music an ultimate emerging solu-

tion is reached, she became aware of a sudden movement about her; an uprising, a pushing-back of chairs. The two giggling girls had risen and were walking quickly away. The old lady was folding up her knitting, pushing her long ivory needles into it; stuffing the whole rapidly into her bag. She also rose and walked away. Children were running. Everyone seemed to be hurrying towards a point at the end of the pier. Had something happened? There was a sound of hurried movement, and another sound which she did not at once recognise as the sound of a voice making an announcement through a megaphone. She was startled — for a moment bewildered. Her face may have asked a question.

It was thus again she who provided an opening. Afterwards she was glad that this had been so, for it exonerated him of any presumption.

"The diving exhibition," he explained, answering her look.

"Oh," she said at once, "of course. I had forgotten. I thought . . ."

"No," he said, "no one has fallen into the sea."

"That was," she said, "what I thought."

She had smiled — laying herself open to another charge! The abominable name for this (always in the light of 'pick up,' 'scrape,' and

the even more degrading 'accost') was 'giving encouragement.' She had still so much sense of independence as not to glance round her to see if anyone was watching. No one was watching. The giggling girls, the knitting woman, and others of whom she had taken less account were gone. But the opinion of strangers would not have had any weight with her. It was herself and the long line of self-respecting Westons that she had to face when the moment came for decision. She had wished him to speak and he had spoken.

He was speaking again. She had not rebuffed him.

"Would you be annoyed . . ." he began and broke off. "May I talk to you?"

She turned slowly and looked at him contemplatively. His voice had already prejudiced her in his favour — a deep voice, deeper somehow than she would have expected. But she did not at once answer him.

"Please," he said, disarming her.

"Yes," she said, after a moment's pause, almost adding aloud the 'Why not?' which was addressed to herself.

"That's kind of you," he said, and hesitated. "I felt — may I say it? — that you wouldn't misunderstand."

She considered this, trying it, as it were, with her eyelids, and then inclined her head slightly.

"I don't misunderstand," she said. "I see no reason why we should not talk. I don't know, all the same, what we can have to say to each other."

For answer he held up his book to her.

The reserve which had expressed itself in her words, and which had not perhaps entirely been absent from her face, disappeared at once like a mist which evaporates.

"Yes," she said, smiling, "that is odd."

It seemed to her also exactly right — happy somehow (a sign that what was happening was intended to happen?) — that they should be reading the same book.

"Yes," she said once more, "that is odd."

"I saw what your book was," he said, "as I gave it back to you. The coincidence was too odd — or seemed too odd — not to justify the venture of pointing it out."

"Yet, after all," she said — she had had time to think now — "why should it seem odd? To either of us? It is not as if it were a rare book — though I think it is that in a sense — or the unknown work of an unknown author. Scores of people must be reading this particular book at this particular moment."

"Because," he said, in a lower voice, but very clearly and deliberately, "I wanted to speak before I saw what you were reading."

She would not have been human — cer-

tainly not woman — if she had not heard this with an inward glow of pleasure. She was trembling a little now, but was sufficiently mistress of herself and of the situation to show no more than that in this further venture he had not offended. His manner, a very perfect blend of frankness and deference, was irreproachable. Moreover, she felt instinctively that she was safe with him.

"Let us talk about the book," she said.

"You have read it before!"

She shook her head.

Neither had he, it seemed.

"But I shall again," she said.

She saw now that when she read it again the fact that he — someone she did not know — had been reading it too would be inextricably associated with it. That, however, was not what she meant when she said that she should read it again.

They talked of the book then, of Lady Constantine, of Swithin, of the stars; thence, by way of the stars, of "Far from the Madding Crowd"; thence, of "The Return of the Native"; of "Under the Greenwood Tree," of "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," of "Jude the Obscure." They touched upon "The Hand of Ethelberta" and "A Laodicean," lingered over "The Mayor of Casterbridge" and "A Pair of Blue Eyes" — the lovable ill-fated Elfride —

disagreed about "The Trumpet Major," met once more over "Life's Little Ironies" and "A Group of Noble Dames"; and returned to "Two on a Tower." Strange surely, really strange, that, as Hardy-lovers, each of them should be reading this particular book for the first time.

"What is it about it?" she said presently. "One can't altogether defend Lady Constantine — or even the conduct of the story. The part about her brother. Her yieldings to him and to the Bishop. Something helpless about her. When she loses her money, for instance, and has to give up her carriage, the driving-about in a donkey-chair. She was a young woman except in relation to Swithin, but it never seems to have occurred to her that she could walk. Because she was Lady Constantine? Ridiculous! Yet, in spite of this and of everything else, she and the story hold one with a sort of spell. What is the spell?"

"Romance," he said at once. "The everlasting appeal of romance."

They were silent for a few moments. The crowd had gravitated now to the end of the Pier, where the diving exhibition was in progress. From time to time the diver's voice could be heard announcing through the megaphone his prospective feats. The tide was nearly at the full. The wash of the water

against the piles below made a background of sound for other sounds. Seagulls were wheeling in the blue, their wings white at certain angles against the sky, white at any angle against the sea. Blue everywhere this morning: in the firmament and the waters under the firmament. Little white clouds, white in the sunlight as the gulls' white wings. Little white sails here and there on the shining sea. Jane Weston with an extraordinary sense of exultation felt her heart in key with the happy day.

"I suppose," she said at last, "it is that."

Again they lapsed into silence, and this, too, pleased her. It seemed to establish the sense of communion which she felt to exist between them and thus finally to absolve their joint adventure of all the taint of vulgarity. Also, in a way, it seemed to isolate them from the rest, shutting them into the little intimate world of their own which their exchange of words had made for them. In this little magic world which she thought of as sanctuary, they could be silent, or talk and increase their mutual understanding. What Emerson said was true. There *were* open moments when the god's will sallied free . . .

He was speaking again and she knew again how much she liked his voice. It fitted somehow with the strong well-bred hands, the at-

traction of which for her was so curiously potent. He was about thirty, she thought, half a dozen years older than herself. Yes, just about thirty, with an engaging mixture of maturity and boyishness.

"The finding," he was saying — "the finding when you don't even know that you are seeking. Swithin to Lady Constantine, who hadn't till then, perhaps, known that she was lonely. And the finding where nothing was to have been expected. Swithin at her own gates — nay, within her own gates. Romance. The everlasting appeal."

He ended thus as he had begun.

"You mean," she said, "that we are all seeking."

"Aren't we?" he said. "Everyone of us?"

She accepted that, though she saw that it involved her in some sort of an admission. Well, she was ready to make admissions — to him. She even wanted to make them.

"Hardy, if there had been any doubt, answers the question himself in the book that we haven't spoken of."

"Is there another?"

She had forgotten, but she remembered even as she spoke, and named it herself. After all, she was not afraid. Or she was not afraid yet.

"Ah, yes," was what she said: "'The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved'!"

So, indirectly, or by implication, they were talking of love within ten minutes of having made each other's acquaintance.

Danger! What of that? So far what of that? Deep in her soul she knew two things: that danger could be attractive, that in unsuspected depths she was capable of welcoming an element of danger; and that danger was not there. In the space of a few minutes she was learning more than periods of as many years had taught her of her own nature and of life. Whatever came of the hazards of the unusual day, the day itself must mark off all that had come before from all that would come after.

But behind all this she knew a third thing that as yet she would not face; that presently, inevitably, they would separate, she to go her way, he to go his. She did not so much put this knowledge from her as refuse to recognise it. The present was all-sufficing. But, unadmitted as this knowledge was, it gave to the living present a vague melancholy. She was very happy.

The gulls wheeled and dipped. Sometimes one would settle on the water, where it looked like a small duck. The little white clouds sailed. The breezes fluttering movable things caused their shadows to flutter and seemed thus to flutter the sunlight.

III

SHE had slipped away from him — in another abominable phrase, 'given him the slip' — under cover of the dispersal of the crowd at the conclusion of the diving exhibition. Panic had seized her. She had seen herself falling in love with him, drawn to him by the appeal of something in him to something in herself, the very existence of which all her training hitherto had taught her not only to ignore, but to deny; drifting, nay, swept, as on a rushing and increasing flood, to she knew not what of ardent surrender. It was herself that she was afraid of, not him. He asked nothing of her. She wanted to give.

So she had snatched her chance of escape. It had offered itself, and, almost before she had known that she wished for such a chance, she had taken it. They had risen and were walking side by side up the Pier. She was still very happy — or one moment she had been very happy, the next a prey to horror. She, Jane Weston, behaving like this; thinking thoughts which, if her companion could have read them, must have shamed her in his eyes as, suddenly, they shamed her, to a very agony of amazement and dismay, in her own. Pier-girls, seaside girls, girls of the cover of every four-penny-half-penny magazine; to the level

of these? She, Jane Weston, her mother's daughter? The crowd surged about them, washing around them like the flood upon which she, a moment later, saw herself swept in another direction. She was separated from him by the passing of a bath-chair — the Queen of Sheba with three chins and floating veils, attended by a bevy of pouter pigeons. Oh, the all-effacing opulence of the Brighton busts! She was hidden from him. She availed herself of the sudden cover; moved quickly under it, before it; slipped aside. Others interposed between him — where he stood waiting for her — and her; and yet others. She saw him, and then could not see him. She knew that he had lost sight of her, but was waiting in perfect confidence for her reappearing. It was now if she wished to escape. Did she? Did she? She did not know. But it was now or never. It was now. She was still moving — away from him. Yes, it was now!

The die was cast. She had wormed her way round to the other side of the pavilion. Thus he had lost her, and thus it was that she had lost him.

The next day, in accordance with plans made long since and undisturbed by the disturbed but outwardly calm Jane, she had left Brighton with her mother for Bournemouth. From her seat beside her in the fly which took

them to the station, she may furtively have raked the streets with eager yet apprehensive eyes; at the station she may, with a straying glance, have been alternately preoccupied and more than normally alert. Mrs. Weston, accustomed to leave everything in her competent hands, noticed nothing unusual.

"What is your book, dear?" Mrs. Weston asked in the train.

Jane looked at the cover as if to see.

"'Two on a Tower.'"

"Not finished that yet!"

"Just finished it now," Jane answered.

"I forget how it ends."

"What's called 'badly,'" said Jane.

CHAPTER II

THE War which had accounted for five of the twelve years that had elapsed since the strange day of Jane's adventure, and turned Europe, and, indeed, the world itself upside down, had, in that out-of-the-way and sparsely populated district, passed the little house in the hills curiously by. Jane, tied by the impossibility of leaving her sick mother, had, after the first longing to be up and doing, bowed to the inevitable and contented herself as best she could with such service as local activities supplied. There was plenty of work to do, and of this she did her share and more than her share. She sat up at night, after her mother had gone to bed, dealing with endless correspondence in connection with wives' allowances and widows' pensions; she bicycled or tramped the hills to distant cottages on her list; with her mother, who had put aside her needlework for knitting, she knitted more socks than she could count. But, when all was said, it was but an echo of the sound of drums and the turmoil of battle, as of things infinitely remote, that reached the seclusion of her mountain fastness. The general upheaval, then, which had freed women once for all, put-

ting them to men's jobs, disposing of their skirts for a symbol that all who ran might read, had left her untouched. Her freedom had come to her but by the gentle death of her mother, within a month of the signing of the armistice. Virtually it had come to her then, actually it had not come to her till the persistent visits of Mr. Morgan (other things, as has been said, and notably Ellen, and the case of Ellen, contributing) had sent her thoughts backward to the day which might have been, or, indeed, which perhaps had been, the turning-point of her life.

She was free and had not known she was free. She was free. It was now that the sense and the realities of her freedom began to occupy her. Mr. Morgan? Hobson's choice? She was free. She had not a tie in the world. Solitary? She need not be solitary unless she chose. She had made an enormous discovery.

And, to further discovery — for hitherto she had not given much thought to her appearance, or even to her feelings — she was young! Her looking-glass did not give her a line or a droop, certainly not a grey hair. Why should it, after all? She was thirty-six. Grey hairs were not due yet, nor any fall of the corners of the mouth or of the cheeks. But her skin was the skin of a young girl, not hardened nor weather-beaten nor lacking in

elasticity and firmness, and her eyes, with plenty of knowledge in their calmness, had the brightness and the clearness of a child's. At thirty-six she looked ten years less, and perhaps was better-looking than she had been at twenty-four. She looked at herself dispassionately, as she might have looked at someone else, but she had become deeply interested. Nothing less like the matureness and the exuberance of the Brighton busts than the firm curves of her breasts under the thin material of her neat workmanlike jumper. She had neither grown fatter nor wasted. It was as if Time had marked time with her. Waited. Was waiting. Her bath showed her every morning the sturdy but not ungraceful nether limbs that tapered to the white beautiful feet. Waited? Was waiting? For what? The years like the War had passed her by.

Why?

She was coming to it. She felt herself to be on the verge of the discovery of all. In her solitariness and the consequent sterility of the sheltered years she had not wilted, nor flagged, nor sagged, nor lost her grip on life. She had not shrivelled nor spread. She had sound teeth and lungs, and the sort of health that never gave her a moment's thought. The women in the village often ailed, and took pleasure and took pride in their ailments.

Mrs. Williams had rheumatism and talked of her joints; even the vital Ellen of the conquests, her occasional headaches. She, their mistress, did not know what it was to be ill. The thing came suddenly. She was . . . could it be that she was? . . . being preserved and reserved for something that had not happened to her yet!

She had been brushing her hair. Her hands, with the brush she was holding, fell to her lap. She sat quite still, gazing with startled almost apprehensive eyes at the face which confronted her in the looking-glass. The idea, for its newness and its unexpectedness and the potentialities with which it was fraught, took her breath away.

For an appreciable time she sat still, her mind, like a parrot with a peanut, revolving it, stripping it of its outer coverings of husk and peel.

"Goodness!" she said to herself. "Goodness!"

For the kernel, freed at last of what was not adapted for assimilation, revealed itself as sound, and, as she savoured it, uncommonly sweet to the palate.

Her toilet took an unusually long time that morning. She went from one pleasant brown study into another, often, for minutes together, forgetting to proceed with her dressing at all.

Her window was open to the view, and to the scents and sounds of the garden. Birds were singing, bees humming. When the weather was as it was to-day, it was difficult to realise or even to remember what it could be like in that mountainous district. In the autumn and the winter — to say nothing of the spring and the summer itself — there could be periods, long or short as the case might be, when the landscape would be blotted out, and when the very air ran water. But when the clouds lifted and the sun shone, you forgot. To-day the valley basked in smiling warmth. Lights and shadows chased each other indolently over the uplands. To the northwest of any tree and prominence lay a pool of shade. Little moving patches of white on the hillsides were the sure-footed horned mountain sheep.

Jane was standing idly at the window when the gong sounded for breakfast. Ten minutes passed before she moved — a quarter of an hour before she was ready to leave her room. She went downstairs absently, not hurrying even then, and paused for a moment or two at the window on the landing. Her preoccupied, eager eyes rested for one of these upon the tower of the church.

Ellen met her in the hall.

"I'll bring the things in, 'm. I'd taken them out to keep hot. You're quite well, 'm?"

"Yes, Ellen. Never felt better."

Into such a groove that a small departure from the accepted routine of the day should call for solicitous enquiry? Into just such a groove! Why grooves? Why grooves at all?

She went into the dining-room. Sambo the cat jumped down noiselessly from the window-sill and rubbed himself, purring, against her ankles. She had not at this time a dog. Her faithful Fanny, the Aberdeen terrier, had died earlier in the year and she had not had the heart yet to replace her. Sambo, tolerating Fanny during her lifetime, did not regret her, and allowed himself now a demonstrativeness which he had seldom shown in the presence of his rival. He was exuberantly affectionate this morning, and Jane adored him.

"What would you say if I went away, Sambo?" she heard herself ask him.

It was thus that she discovered — discoveries somehow in the air — that she had any thought of going away.

Why shouldn't she go away?

Ellen appeared with the teapot and the breakfast dishes. She watched her absently as she put the things on the table. Deft service, Ellen's. Her movements had a silent neatness that was very pleasant. Jane had not even had to train her. Her competence and her sense of order were inherent.

If she went away, she would take Ellen with her, turning her for the time being into a lady's-maid.

So she was thinking of going away?

She became aware of the pleasant smell of toast and of bacon. She must think. But first she must have her breakfast. She was hungry. She was also curiously happy.

She knew presently what was in her mind. She was not merely going away. If she went — and she was going! — it was with a definite purpose. Why should she not admit it? She was going out into the world to look for a unit amongst millions. Ludicrous! The maddest project that had ever entered into the mind of man or woman. She was going to look for a needle — and a needle which might no longer exist — not in any particular bundle of hay, but in all the hay that the round world held. Madness! Sheer imbecility! But she was going. She laughed aloud — joyously. Adventure. She was going out on deliberate adventure.

Reaction set in in the course of the morning. The mood of exaltation and excitement to which she had worked died down as the ordinary occupations of the day claimed her attention. The little smiling house, the dusting

of the treasures in which she did not entrust even to the careful hands of the competent Ellen — how could she leave it and them? The garden which was her pleasure and her pride? It had never looked so beautiful, never, she thought, looked so dependent upon her loving care. No garden that she had ever seen gave her quite such a feeling of satisfaction. It was hers, moreover; much of it she had made herself with the help of old man Evans, who came twice a week and, unlike most hirelings, was malleable and even quick to take an idea. It was a hanging garden like the gardens of Babylon. It shelved from the plateau upon which the house was built, in diminishing breadths connected by stone or turfed steps, for a considerable distance down the hillside. These terraces, the two lowest of which she had planned herself and with Evans — reclaimed from the waste, legally or not, she had not bothered much to enquire — were an unending delight to her. She had cut the sods of turf for the steps and for the broad grass paths from a smooth slope in a neighbouring dingle; folded them in neat rolls, like the rolls of cloth in a draper's shop, and piled them for transport in Evans's wheelbarrow; laid them with his assistance, flattened them down with the garden roller, watered them, mown them, weeded them of plantain and moss and dande-

lion and daisy, till they were sleek and even as the lawns of Oxford. Could she tear herself from her lawns in the season of their most velvety greenness, from the scents and the colours of her borders, from the harvest of her roses? By midday it had begun to appear impossible. Her labours had been labours of love, and labours of love bind you. What use to tell yourself that you were free when with your own hands you had bound yourself more securely than alien hands could have bound you? She had grown to her isolation as the sods of turf, welding themselves to seamless oneness, had grown to the underlying soil of the hill. Deeper roots hers than theirs.

Yes, dreams, dreams; and dreams, except that one long dream in which it might be said that her sheltered, isolated life was spent, were not for her. She might go away for a time, very probably she would go away, but the hare-brained dream of an Odyssey was out of the question. Foolish as well as mad — foolish rather than mad. She had missed her chance twelve years ago, rejected it of deliberate purpose. She must abide sensibly by the choice she had made then. Five years of the twelve, moreover, had filled the world with graves. Some little wooden cross in France or Belgium or Russia or Germany or Serbia or Palestine,

or anywhere else that you would think of in connection with the events of those momentous years, stood, it is most likely, for the outward and visible sign of the end of her romance.

This her mood as she gardened. By luncheon-time she had abandoned her project. She would go to the sea in August or in September. She would go abroad, perhaps. Venice or the Italian lakes. Time enough to think about that. Yes, she would probably begin to go about a little. It was expedient now that she should. But this was her home. Impossible to desert it, or even leave it for more than a month or two. She put down her trowel, shook the earth from her loose gardening gloves, stretched herself, and experienced a sort of relief to feel that she had come to her senses. She was free again; free to another and a better sort of freedom.

That afternoon she had an engagement; a tea-party at Miss Rod's of the Bank. There would be tea and cakes and fruit and the local gossip that passes for conversation at reunions of the kind. Jane, who had been supposed to be Superior at Cheltenham and Leamington and Bath, had accepted Aberllwyn without reserve. Perhaps at these places she had given herself what were called 'airs.' She

certainly gave herself none here. At three o'clock she put on her best hat and set forth.

She descended the two flights of stone steps and the two flights of turfed steps, and went out through the little gate at the end of the lowest terrace on to the common. Here, through the gorse (which reminded her of something — yes, of Ellen's unknown admirer), she made her way on to the road which wound down into the valley. On the common every clump was golden with the blossom. The scent of the little clustered flowers filled the air and was potent even on the road — where the encounter presumably had taken place. But she did not want to think of that, or of Ellen, just then. Too intimately connected, Ellen, and the case of Ellen, with the trains of thought which had led to the project she had now so comfortably abandoned. She would breathe the scent of the gorse and enjoy it for its own sake. It was, for her, the pleasant, all-pervading scent of her pleasant, unmenaced security. She breathed it in deeply, surrendering herself to the placid, happy influences of the day. In a mood of unruffled contentment she reached her destination.

But her recent disturbance — the waking of the sleeping dogs, and sleeping dogs, moreover, which had slept so long — had had greater

effect upon her than she had supposed. She had not been ten minutes in the society of Miss Rod and her half-dozen guests before she was asking herself, and not entirely against her will, what she was doing in that galley. Miss Rod's party was buzzing with excitement over a piece of news which one of its members had had the pride of springing upon the assembly. Lord Barmouth had sold Plas Llwyn.

There was for you! The heavens you might have thought had fallen!

"Had you heard, Miss Weston?" No, she hadn't heard. "None of us had heard. Plas Llwyn. *Plas Llwyn!* Fancy."

"The War, I suppose," Jane said. "The papers are full of the changing of hands of the old places."

"But Plas Llwyn! To think of strangers there! One of our Stately Homes. Why, it's been in 'Country Life.' The Courtyard. The Long Gallery. The Yellow Drawing-Room. The old Lord would turn in his grave. He has, I shouldn't be surprised, if we could look into his coffin in the vault. I blame Lady Barmouth, myself."

"Blame?" said Jane.

"Such very short skirts for a woman of her age. I never really trusted her. And so seldom in residence. Three months in the autumn; what's three months? In old Lord Barmouth's

time the family was in residence continually. Not just for the shooting. So hospitable, too. There used to be dinner-parties. I used to dine there frequently in the old days with my dear father. Mrs. Andrew Thomas will remember the pleasant dinner-parties — don't you, Mrs. Andrew Thomas?"

Mrs. Andrew Thomas remembered.

"Two a year," she said. "I wore my amethysts."

"And who's bought the place?" Jane asked.

"Ah, that's what Mr. Roberts can't tell us, can you, Mr. Roberts?"

Mr. Roberts could not tell them. The name of the purchaser had not 'transpired.' Plas Llwyn had been sold by private treaty. All must have been done very quickly for nothing to have leaked out, as it were, in the process of the transaction. You might have knocked Mr. Roberts down with a feather when he had heard that the thing was a *fait accompli*. Mr. Roberts, who wore what he called 'ponce-nay,' said 'fate accomply.'

"I said, 'You don't say! Well, there's a business,' I said. For indeed I was surprised."

"Ah, you may well say that," said Miss Rod.

"It isn't as if his lordship had ever talked of selling," said Mr. Roberts. "I saw him not so very many months ago. At the Shrewsbury

Flower Show, it was, where he'd taken a prize for his orchids, and I remember I congratulated him, and he said, 'Thank you, Mr. Roberts. Very kind of you, I'm sure'; and we had quite a little talk. But not a word about any thought of selling. Strange; don't you think so, Miss Weston?"

"Well, no," said Jane; but her opinion was lost in the hubbub of opinions. Miss Rod thought the old families had *duties*. Mrs. Andrew Thomas agreed with her. So did Mrs. Evans of the Valley. So did Mrs. Vaughan Rees, the doctor's wife.

Miss Rod's dear father used to call the old Lord Barmouth 'Our Little King.'

"'Ichabod,'" said Miss Rod; "'The glory has departed.'"

"Or, 'How are the mighty fallen,' is it?" said Mr. Roberts.

"Well, that's much the same thing," said Miss Rod, but held to 'The glory has departed' because she had a ring with 'Mizpah' on it, which she did know meant 'The Lord judge between me and thee,' so she was almost quite sure. The reasoning seemed to Jane a little obscure, but it appeared to satisfy the company. The mighty were fallen and the glory had departed.

A move was made for the tea-tables.

"I hoped Mr. Morgan would have been with

us," Miss Rod said to Jane, "but his mother is ill and he's had to go to Aberdovey."

Jane, conscious suddenly of a relief that Mr. Morgan should be away, said she was sorry that Mrs. Morgan was ill.

"Such a devoted son. Mrs. Andrew Thomas, will you sit here? You like a high chair I know. Miss Lewis will pour for me, won't you, Miss Lewis? Mrs. Vaughan Rees likes hers very weak. Mr. Roberts, if you'd kindly . . . yes, the cream is by your elbow." And so on and so on, and then back to the Barmouths.

The Royal Family you might have thought had abdicated.

Miss Rod, when at six o'clock Jane rose to go, was deliberating whether, when the new people arrived, she would be able to bring herself to call upon them. Mrs. Andrew Thomas, supported by Mrs. Vaughan Rees, thought one would have to be Neighbourly.

Jane, critical for the first time in twelve years, laughed all the way home.

A note lay on the table in the hall. Mr. Morgan, on the eve of his departure for the sick-bed of his mother, had written to propose for her hand.

CHAPTER III

JANE took rooms in Clarges Street. She put up for a couple of nights at the Great Western Hotel, while she looked round, and, making first for these lodgings in which she had once stayed with her mother, was lucky enough to find them vacant. The house had changed hands, but her appearance satisfied the landlady, who did not even trouble to take up the reference to her bankers with which Jane had supplied her, and, with Ellen, Jane moved into her new quarters on the third day. She had a sitting-room, a bedroom, and a bathroom on the ground floor, and Ellen a little bedroom within call — on the half-landing at the head of the first flight of stairs. Ellen, quickly making friends with the landlady's two nieces, the working staff of the house, was allowed the use of the sitting-room in the basement. Thus, what to do with Ellen, at necessarily close quarters, was satisfactorily settled, and Jane felt that, at the outset at least, Fortune had smiled on her.

She had no plans. Mr. Morgan's letter had but clinched matters. She must get away before he came back from Aberdovey. That, for the moment, was all that was urgent, and

the length of her wanderings would be determined by circumstances. She made her arrangements speedily and without difficulty. Mrs. Williams had a sister-in-law who would bear her company in charge of the house. Old man Evans would look after her beloved garden. With an excitement only second in degree to the excitement of Ellen, she had swathed her furniture in dust sheets, put away the china in the capacious cupboards, packed her boxes, and set out for London and what the future might hold for her. She was frankly experimenting, nothing more — putting her newly discovered freedom to the test, but finding that it held. She had stretched her wings and they bore her. She had alighted easily and gently on her feet.

What surprised her, however, was that she was not only excited but very happy. She took Ellen on shopping expeditions and bought clothes. After her long retirement the streets and the shops were almost as great a delight to her as they were to Ellen. Actually it was, of course, a chastened, not to say a harassed, London to which she had come, but, to her as to Ellen, it was a place of cheerful bustle and, in comparison with the quiet of the Welsh hills, of unbridled gaiety. There were signs of wear and tear, it was true, which, with recollections of London of the days before the War,

she could not fail to observe, but already there were signs also that it was recovering its spirits and even its spirit. Neglect was giving place to renovation. An army of house-painters was at work, and this was what Jane saw rather than the plaster which was peeling off the houses. For the rest there were strikes, there were rumours of strikes, there were threats, there were rumours of threats, there was a sudden notable decline of good manners; but the sun was in the sky, and the sky was noticeably blue, and Jane was in the holiday mood. She looked, perhaps, but without consciously choosing to look, through rose-coloured glasses.

"To-morrow," she said to Ellen, "I'll take you to Saint Paul's Cathedral."

Ellen thought Saint Paul's Cathedral very nice. She thought his Churchyard, where, incidentally, her mistress bought a new hat for her, still nicer.

"I shall have something to tell them when I get back, 'm, shan't I?"

"Enjoying yourself, Ellen?"

"Rather, 'm, and thank you. Aren't you?"

"Yes," said Jane, smiling, "I'm enjoying myself."

She was even enjoying the thought of what would be said of her at Aberllwyn, whence her departure had certainly been sudden enough

to invite legitimate comment. Mr. Roberts's "Well, indeed!" and "You don't say!" were as audible to her as if she had really heard them. But, as he would not know of the letter which had precipitated her action, she did not suppose that he would go, in her case, to the length of the "What a business!" which he had applied to that of Lord Barmouth. "Very secret, though, don't you think? Amongst friends. And not a word to any of us."

She loved Aberllwyn, she even loved its funny limited little society. She would love both all the more for a temporary withdrawal from breadths and narrownesses that, in howsoever different ways, were alike cramping. Streets for open spaces; crowds for a handful of persons round a parish pump. Of Mr. Morgan she thought very kindly. He it was, when all was said, who, indirectly as it might be, had shown her that she was young and caused her to see that she was free. God bless Mr. Morgan.

And, whether she took her preposterous idea of a Quest seriously or not, it gave the most trivial of her comings and goings a background at least of interest. Anywhere, at any moment, she might come face to face with her lost admirer. She laughed at the word even as she applied it. After all it was the word that met the case. She had been admired.

No question about that. A little more, but a very little more, she believed, and it would have been a bigger word that she could have used. Lover? Lover! Yes, he had been potentially her lover. On that, as on oars, she might rest.

Meanwhile, as if to encourage her, or at any rate to lay stress on the superiority in the matter of chances, of London, where men congregated, over the Welsh hills, where they did not, she ran across people she had never expected to see again. If she ran across one, she might run across another. In Bond Street she heard herself addressed by name.

"Miss Weston! It *is* Miss Weston."

She turned her eyes on the speaker. For a moment or two she was astray. Then out of the dimness a name came to her lips.

Mrs. Altringham, an acquaintance of the Cheltenham days. They talked. They picked up the threads, spoke of Mrs. Weston; of this one and that; of Amy who had worked with a canteen in France, of Constance who was married and living in Devonshire; of Jimmy — you remember Jimmy — who had come safe through the War and was now in India, and engaged to a very charming girl. Jane remembered Jimmy as a lanky youth with *pince-nez*. "Ah, you smile. Jimmy had a very tender spot in his heart for you. I remember

one night at the Bachelors' Ball — but Miss Weston wouldn't look at Jimmy or any of our Cheltenham young men."

Had she given herself airs? Had there been cause? But, also, had she been more desired and more desirable than she had known?

What had really made her smile, however, was a recollection of the '*ponce-nay*' of Mr. Roberts.

"No, Jimmy wasn't by any means the only one," Mrs. Altringham was saying slyly. "There was young Denison, and there was Algy Nicoll. They used to confide in me. I used to say to them all — to Jimmy too — 'My dear boys,' I used to say, 'Faint Heart never won Fair Lady.'"

"Was I so unapproachable?"

It was a new view to Jane — or almost a new view.

"The proud Miss Weston," Mrs. Altringham said archly.

Well, the proud Miss Weston had been hoist with her own petard.

"Johnny Denison was demobilised last year and is chicken-farming somewhere in Sussex — near Worthing, I think. Algy Nicoll I saw only the other day. His wife had just presented him with a son and heir. Their third child — the first two, girls. He married one of the Robsons — Annette, the dark one. Yes,

time flies, doesn't it? It doesn't, by the way, with you, my dear. You look hardly a day older."

Jane said she was older inside. But the testimony to what she had seen for herself pleased her. Nor could she be otherwise than pleased by what she had learnt. It all went, with the unexpected meeting itself, to buoy her up in certain ridiculous hopes and fancies.

"You must let me come and see you — Clarges Street. I shall remember the number. And you must come and see us. Can't we fix up something now? Amy would love to see you. What about Thursday? The Lamsons are lunching with us. You remember Lady Lamson. Wait, I've got a card. Half-past one then on Thursday. Well, this has been jolly. We must do some theatres. We'll arrange that. Till Thursday then."

They parted with mutual expressions of gratification. Jane went on her way smiling.

Five minutes later she had met someone else.

"Bless me soul! Jane Weston are you? Annie Weston's daughter!"

She had almost forgotten that she had any relations. The wizened face of a little old gentleman at the entrance of the Æolian Hall had become vaguely familiar. Old Abel Tremlet, a distant cousin of her mother's.

"Well, God bless me soul! It must be — how many years? Fancy your remembering me."

"I remember you quite well," Jane said. "We went to see you when we came up to prove Uncle Edmund's will. You were in South Eaton Place. You had a shaggy white dog and you played the piano."

"I am still. Billy. Poor old Billy — been dead these ten years. Played to you, did I? Fingers a bit stiffer now. But I've got a new piano which you shall hear. So you're Jane Weston, are you?"

She said that she was.

"Yes, now I come to look at you, you are. I was very fond of your mother. I liked your father, too, you know." He rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "Here, where are you sitting? Give me your ticket." He held out his hand for it. "I'll see if I can't change it for one next to mine, or get two together somewhere. You and I must have a talk — not while he's playing, though, mind that, young woman!"

Jane, laughing happily, said she never talked during music.

"See you don't then. There was a girl behind me at the Queen's Hall on Sunday — a damned minx with what they call 'bobbed' hair. . . . Stay here. Don't move till I come back to you."

He hurried off to the box-office. Jane watched him. He returned to her, holding fresh tickets.

"Sixth row, but the best they could do."

"But that will do beautifully."

"For you, my dear, beautifully. For me equally, though differently, beautifully. I'm seventy-four, and ordinarily I like to be near."

She saw that she was not meant to expostulate.

"Well, it's delightful of you," she said, "and I'm not going to spoil my pleasure by feeling guilty."

His 'Good girl!' showed her that she took the right line.

They went up the stairs and into the hall.

"Have you heard him?" he asked when they had taken their seats and opened their programmes.

'Him' was the pianist they had come to hear.

"I've heard no one," Jane said, "for twelve years. I had heard of him, of course. I saw he was going to play Debussy. That was what brought me. All's fish that comes to my net, Cousin Abel."

They talked music for a few minutes.

All the time Jane was thinking of the strangeness of what was happening to her. Half an hour ago she would have said that she was

alone in London, where, as she would have put it, she didn't know a soul. This half-hour had shown her that she was mistaken. The world was smaller, or larger, than she had supposed. The Altringhams, the Lamsons whom she was to meet at luncheon — others possibly in their trail, and yet others if she chose to follow up clues — and now her cousin Abel Tremlet, whose very existence for the time being she had forgotten; the strange half-hour had given her these. Of him, Abel Tremlet, she would presently, it was probable, have bethought herself, and she might even have betaken herself to South Eaton Place one of these days to see if he yet lived. Here she was, however, without any effort of her own, sitting beside him and picking up the threads with him as she had picked them up with the equally unexpected Mrs. Altringham. It was as if she had discovered that she had still a place in the world. Social vistas, however modest, were opening up before her. She was, anyway, no longer as one unaccounted for; had references, so to speak, other than mere references to bankers and the like. This wonderful London held people who not only knew her, but knew about her. If she was out, as she was, for a sort of eminently innocent street-walking, it had shown her that it recognised her as having, if not a local

habitation, at least a name. She was an Honest Woman.

"What fun!" she said to herself. "What fun!"

"You'll come back to tea with me afterwards."

The little wizened face was quite perky. Cousin Abel, clearly, was enjoying himself as much as Jane.

"Now, ssh," he said to her, and "*Ssh!*" fiercely over his shoulder to the body of the hall. The music had begun.

The pianist, a young American, could certainly play Debussy.

"I don't try to keep up," Cousin Abel said in one of the intervals. "Mind you, I grant you Debussy, or I should not be here. And Ravel. One or two others. But I'm old-fashioned. Scriabin? *Vers la flamme* perhaps. Though even there . . . and what he really means . . . Stravinsky? Yes. Strauss? But the extremists. Abécé. Def. Ghijk. That lot. You like them, I suppose. You young ones all do or pretend that you do."

"I'm your Country-Cousin," Jane said. "You forget I'm not in a position to judge."

"Then there's hope for you. But their poetry! Do you know their poetry — their *Vers Libres* as they call them. *And* their pictures! Heaven help us. Have you seen their pictures?"

Jane hadn't. But she had seen the papers — reproductions of 'their' pictures in the papers.

"Patience, O Lord! Grant me patience!"

"You dear old thing!" Jane said to herself. "You old *dear!*"

She was fond of him already. She was with him, too, up to a point, or knew that she would be with him. She had her own theories about the Moderns — about their pictures, anyway. The movement there had begun with a pulling of legs, wasn't it that? And the legs had taken it seriously. The rest was automatic. From such a start you just went one better — or one worse. The silly legs, for very fear of being supposed to lag, would continue to take you seriously. They were committed. She, too, perhaps, her deliberate campaign of 'street-walking' notwithstanding, was old-fashioned.

A taxi, when the recital was over, conveyed her new-found relation to South Eaton Place.

"London," he said. "This isn't London. You've none of you seen London. The invention of the motor was the beginning of the end, or one of the beginnings. I'm not sorry for you young ones. You know no better. You should have seen the London of the seventies and eighties. There were gentlemen then, and ladies. There was an aristocracy. There were wines in those days, and one was allowed to drink them. Women didn't go

about half-naked, trying to look like — well, never mind what — succeeding, too, by the bye. We looked after our girls. *Ta-ra-ra-ra-boom-de-ay* hadn't been sung then to teach you — I don't mean *you*, you understand — that you could kick over the traces. (Something in that song, mark you! — more than the writer and the composer knew probably, or the clever singer either! It was a War Cry.) And then came the bicycle and freed you. The chaperon got her death-blow the day the first woman, a skirt on one side and a leg on the other, wobbled down Sloane Street to Battersea Park."

"Oh, come," said Jane, "don't be too hard on us."

"My dear, the boot's on the other foot. It's you who are hard on us. You've got your vote and your latchkeys and your cigarettes and your seats in the House. You've broken up family life. You get your divorces — ten a minute. Your babies without benefit of the clergy, if you want babies. You say 'Damn' and you say 'Bloody' — not you, of course. In a sense you've even had your war. What more do you want?"

"Personally," Jane said, smiling, "I'm not sure that I have wanted any of these things. I do, by the way, ride a bicycle."

"Archaic. The day before the day before yesterday."

They were nearing their destination.

"After tea you'll give me a cigarette."

"Abandoned creature!"

They were turning out of Eaton Square.

"But you're right about one thing. I don't say 'Bloody.'"

As the taxi stopped, he was asking her why she wasn't married.

"Nobody's asked me," she said, and then remembered that that wasn't true.

CHAPTER IV

SHE was ready to bet that it would be a butler and not a parlourmaid who would open the door. It was a butler; the same butler, she fancied, who had opened the door to her mother and to herself on the occasion of their visit years before. Abel Tremlet would have no servant troubles. He would have a butler, moreover, if only as a protest against the changes which for most people had done away with butlers. He had put down his footman, he told her presently, and that was as far as he intended to go.

"I'll live as I've lived, please God. There are decencies and amenities that I've been accustomed to, and till I'm bled the last drop — which I shall be! — I'll stick to 'em. Now, my dear."

Johnson had brought in tea and been told to say 'Not at home.'

"If Lady Anson calls I'm in Kamskatka."

"Very good, sir."

"Who's Lady Anson?"

"An old woman who can't get Johnsons, and would like to marry me for mine."

Jane laughed and was asked what she was laughing at.

"You, Cousin Abel."

They were making strides, both of them. Jane felt that she had known him for years. She liked his little wizened face, which reminded her of the face of a prematurely aged child, and the humorous whimsical lines whch traced their network about the eyes and the corners of the mouth. His teeth were his own, by growth not purchase, and were notably white. They gave his old face a look of youth that was almost startling when he smiled. His eyes could smile without the help of his mouth; his mouth without the concurrence of his eyes. His wife, she had heard her mother say, had adored him. She could believe it.

His tea was excellent — as good as her own, on which she prided herself, or even Miss Rod's of the Bank. There was buttered toast which was excellent also. She would have expected the cake — since at some point he said that he never touched cake — to be stale, but it was not. On the contrary, it was delicious, and she said so.

"Is it? Mrs. Johnson's. She shall make you one. God help you if you have to eat bought cakes these days."

"When exactly did the world come to an end, Cousin Abel?"

"Didn't they ration you in Aber-me-what-you-may-call-it?"

Jane said there *were* cards.

"As I supposed," said her cousin. "In the country you were able to wangle. You had cream, I dare say, when they were taking away my whiskey. They fed us on margarine and offal. Ever tasted margarine?"

But Jane had. They had done their bits in that sense as in others even at Aber-me-what-you-may-call-it.

Later she learned what, in those other senses, Cousin Abel had done — though not, in the first instance, from him. From Johnson in one of his talks.

"Up at seven," Johnson told her. "Out of the house at half-past eight and at the hospital till nine and ten, sometimes, at night. Oh, management, 'm. He'd helped to equip it. Office work — anything that had to be seen to. At his age, 'm, and not a grumble. If he'd a grievance it was that he couldn't enlist. Did you know Mr. Geoffrey, 'm — the Captain, I should say."

Jane had not known Abel Tremlet's son. Her mother had intended to write, and somehow had not written, when they had seen his name amongst the killed at Vimy Ridge.

They were to talk of him often, she and his father, in the course of Jane's stay in London, but on this first day of their renewed acquaintance, the cheerful bantering note which had

been struck was maintained, and it was not till the following evening, when Jane dined with him, that deeper notes were sounded.

To this tête-à-tête dinner Jane looked forward all the next day. She spent the morning at the National Gallery, and took Ellen to Madame Tussaud's in the afternoon. The harvest of the day before, with its promise of what was yet to be garnered, coloured each one of her many impressions. At the National Gallery she amused herself by picking out the pictures which she believed would be the pictures he liked. They were those, chiefly, that she most liked, herself. Moroni's "Tailor," for instance, with its ruminative eyes, the "Now let me see" in them . . . the "Have I allowed enough for . . . this or that . . . ?" Van Eyck's "Jan Arnolfini and his wife"; Hobbema's "Avenue." Holbein's "Duchess of Milan"; the little still-life by Chardon — the loaf, the knife, the squat bottle, the glass of red wine. Botticelli's "Nativity of Christ"; Antonio Pollajuolo's (or Verocchio's?) "Tobias and the Angel," for the slung fish and something of jauntiness and undulation, respectively, in the gaits of the travellers; Titians, Raphaels, Rembrandts, Van Dycks, Leonardo da Vincis, Rubenses, Clauds, Turners, Reynoldses, Gainsboroughs, and so on and so on,

taking her goods where she found them, haphazard almost, and giving to her imagined companion tastes as catholic as her own. The recently acquired El Greco, "The Agony in the Garden," would he like that? — pass it as he 'passed' Stravinsky, say, grudgingly, or pass it by as one of his beginnings of the end? She was not sure. But her speculations afforded her infinite amusement. She saw his little crumpled face everywhere; addressed it sometimes with smiling eyes.

"Come," she said to it now as she stood in front of El Greco's steel-blues, ice-blues, and purple pinks, his gauntnesses and his starknesses, "Come now. Admit!"

A man standing near her caught the smile in the tail of her eye as she turned, and would have spoken. She moved away. But she was pleased.

At Madame Tussaud's in the afternoon she was as light-hearted as Ellen. Ellen, separated from her for a moment or two, *was* spoken to. She lectured Ellen, telling her that a girl always brought these things upon herself, but she did not altogether believe what she said, and she was laughing before she had finished. She did not say that was an insult which she knew to be, howsoever back-handedly, a compliment, or rather a tribute. When she saw following glances on herself, as she did here in

London, she laughed inwardly, telling herself that she was catching Ellen up. London, like Cousin Abel, with his "Why aren't you married?" was great fun.

At seven o'clock she was back in Clarges Street dressing to dine with him. She chose the prettiest of her simple evening dresses, the finest of her silk stockings, the smartest of her new shoes. The long looking-glass in her bedroom gave her, when all was done, a reflection which endorsed Ellen's purrings and exclamations of approval

"Lovely, 'm. I never see you look so nice."

"Well, get me a taxi," she said to Ellen; and to her reflection, which now gave her the additional enhancement of the light silk wrap Ellen had hung over her shoulders, "No. Not by any means so bad!"

She arrived early in South Eaton Place, and, thus, had the talk with Johnson — the first of many — which shed for her the new lights upon her old cousin. It *was* Johnson who had admitted her and her mother on the day, years ago, of their visit.

"Oh, yes, 'm, I remembered. I should have known you anywhere, 'm. I've a good memory for faces, and you haven't changed."

And Johnson, like someone else, had seen her only once. If he, then, remembered her, who

had seen her only once — on a single occasion, that is — and more fleetingly than that other in whose company she had spent some thirty memorable minutes — what that was unlikely might not come to pass?

So, in their various ways, all the things that were happening to her conspired to encourage her.

"Well, my dear."

"Well, Cousin Abel."

She kissed him. He held her at arm's length to survey her. Her smiling eyes did not falter under his scrutiny.

"You look about twenty," he said, "though I know you to be rather more than that.'

"Yes, I'm rather more than that."

"You know how to dress yourself. Upon my word. Very nice. Very nice, indeed. I ought to have taken you to the Savoy, or somewhere, where there would have been someone to see you and to see me in your company."

"You will one of these days," Jane said.

"By Jove, I will. That's a bargain. They shall see me in your glory."

"Very well, I'll keep you to that."

She waited for the inevitable slap at the times. It came.

She even looked a lady, which not one in fifty did then-a-days.

"Cousin Abel!" she said.

Dinner was announced, and he led her to the dining-room. The dinner, which began with oysters, was just such a dinner as she would have expected if, in advance, she had given it a thought; simple, exquisitely cooked, excellently served. Johnson, moving with discreet and silent tread, putting down or removing plates, slipping a fork beside your plate or standing watchfully behind his master's chair, would be called into the conversation from time to time to verify a date, or supply a name, or corroborate a statement, as the case might be. Ritual and informality. Precision, order, the rites and ceremonies sacred to the hour, and the human note.

"Fill Miss Weston's glass, Johnson. Don't mind what she says."

"But in Aber-me-what-you-may-call-it," said Jane, protesting, "we're not accustomed to champagne."

"Johnson will tell you that this won't hurt you," said Cousin Abel.

And 'this' didn't, though, to please him, she finished her second glass. His port — a 'this' also she perceived — he allowed her to refuse, with but a 'Silly girl!' for comment.

They sat over their coffee and cigarettes.

Presently they moved to the drawing-room. Solid Victorian comfort here. It was a hand-

some rather than a pretty room. The antimacassars of its period were gone, but the chairs and sofas, which had borne them in their day, were there — even the round mahogany table on which albums and books in ornamental bindings (Rogers's "Italy"?) had probably reposed. With this table as a sort of base — pushed though it was now, from its former place in the middle of things, into the inconspicuousness of a corner — you could reconstruct, not the room itself, for that was unnecessary, so little had it ever been changed, but the gracious, comfortable, unmenaced life which had been lived in it. There were ottomans, beaded stools; a *garniture de cheminée* on each of the two marble mantelpieces; there were screens; what-nots; there was an S-shaped settee; a davenport; a gilt console table, between the windows, with a tall looking-glass over it, reflecting a model, in carved and pierced ivory, of the Taj Mahal; there were vases of coloured glass, amber and crimson and blue; many ornate abominations; but, with all these, something was palpably present that, in the austere rooms of a more discriminating and æsthetic taste, might be sought for in vain.

"A mausoleum," he said, "isn't it?"

"Nothing so alive was ever a mausoleum," said Jane.

"A protest, then."

"That's better. It would be that. Yes, it wouldn't be yours if it wasn't a protest."

But she saw it as something more than a protest, or as something different. She saw it as Sanctuary, and said so.

The word, as she spoke it, took her back, for some momentarily forgotten association, to the Pier at Brighton. When she had remembered, her thought was that, incidentally, you could make sanctuary anywhere.

"Yes, it's that, too. Anyway, I keep it as it were 'stuffed' — like a room in the Victoria and Albert Museum. They haven't got a Victorian room there, by the way. I might present it to them as it stands, when I die. Actually, of course, my precious daughter-in-law will have it to laugh at and sell. It's really, of course, as hideous as she thinks it."

"Oh, it *isn't* hideous!" Jane said. Nor was it. She saw it, or saw through it.

"Yes, my dear, it is. Betty's right about that, if I don't think she is about most things. And that, too, is why it's a protest, and why, by the same token, it would be rather amusing to make a proviso that she wasn't to sell it. 'The old wretch!' I can hear her. 'The wicked old man!' Her own rooms, I may tell you, have orange vermilion carpets and black walls and purple ceilings."

That sounded rather intriguing, Jane said.

"Intriguing. Yes, that's the word for it — and for her too."

Presently he was telling her.

"He thought the world of her and that, I know, ought to be enough for me. You never saw him. Oh, I suppose I'm a bitter old man. I don't see her as he saw her, and he, thank God, didn't see her as I do. This little flimsy rubbishy imitation-harlot. Pretty. Oh, she's pretty enough. I grant her that. If I'd taken you to the Savoy to-night or the Carlton, I could have shown her to you in dozens, with her clutched cloak and her clutched gold bag — I wonder all the same whether she ever got up from a chair, or went out of a room, without dropping and, if possible, losing something! — and her gold cigarette-case and her cigarette-holder a yard long. She wears a dog like the rest of them, as you might wear a muff, and that's clutched, too. Not that I've anything to say against her dog. You can love their dogs, I've found, without loving them."

His mouth curved to its smile. There was no smile in his eyes.

"Bitter, yes, I suppose I am. Mind, there may be nothing actually vicious in her — there's nothing, that is, that I know of positively. I use words that I oughtn't to use.

But the type — light, light, *light*. Her clothes and her dancing-partners and her bridge clubs. Dancing, when he was out fighting for her in France. At Ciro's, the night the telegram came. They brought it round to me from Charles Street, and I went and fetched her. I fetched her all right!"

The smile reached his eyes. Jane looked away.

"Geoffrey tied to that! Geoffrey. Geoffrey. But Geoffrey freed from that — thank God, I sometimes think! — before his eyes were opened. Oh, she cried hers out. Cried for a week. Let her then. Let her. And while she cried, let her realise if she could in her paltry little soul what she had to cry about."

He ceased speaking and there was a long pause. When he spoke again it was more quietly.

"You mustn't imagine we quarrel. We're good enough friends when we meet. She was his wife and he loved her. It's only when I allow myself to think. I wish you could have known him. He wasn't much like his ugly old father, I may tell you. Got his looks from his mother, who had looks and to spare, as I dare say your mother's told you. Six foot one in his socks — a sight for the eyes, if you'd ever seen him stripped for bathing. He had his mother's features and her clear skin and her

thick shining hair. He had brains, too, and some of those he may have got from his reprehensible old father. At the bar and doing well when this damned War broke out. But I'm not going to talk of the War, and his cleverness and his capabilities aren't the point. The point is the nature that went with those looks and those qualities of his. Wasted on her, wasted. She doesn't know truth when she sees it. How should she? — little wisp of appealing insincerities. She got him and didn't even know what she'd got. Oh, my dear, my dear, why didn't he marry something real — something with ballast — someone like you?"

It was Jane suddenly who 'clutched.' Her hand, toying with a slender chain, tightened on her throat.

"Play to me," she said when she could command her voice. "You promised to play to me."

"Yes, he said, "I'll play to you. What shall I play?"

They went to the piano. This, to be in keeping with the room, should have been littered with framed photographs. It was not. At some time or other a clean sweep must have been made of the array of débutantes and dowagers in Drawing-Room dress — their trains spread in front of them, plumes in their hair — which must once, she thought, have

adorned it. No. He had spoken of a new piano. The sweep had been made, she decided, when its predecessor had made way for it. It stood bare and clear in the inner room.

CHAPTER V

JANE now found herself pleasantly involved in a little whirl of social activities. She had no sooner dined with her old Tremlet cousin and picked up the threads with him than she was lunching with Mrs. Altringham in her flat in Victoria Street, and picking up further threads with her, and with the party which she had been asked to meet. One thing, or rather one person, led to another, and a fortnight had not passed before, with hitherto unbounded leisure and not a call of any sort upon her time, she was in the position of having to think before she accepted an invitation or made an engagement. She, Jane Weston of Aber-me-what-you-may-call-it! It was amusing. It was also very agreeable. People liked her; wanted her; admired her even. The days of Mr. Morgan seemed curiously remote; the days of Cheltenham and Bath and Leamington nearer in one way, further still in another; the days in which she was living, these full live London days, pregnant with possibilities, the only days which counted. Absorbed in them, interested, happy, excited, but calmly excited, where, now, the Jane of the restrictions? —

the Jane of the lonely Welsh hills and Hobson's choice?

Mr. Morgan had written her a letter accepting the situation — what her mother would have called a thoroughly nice letter. Jane had responded as cordially. The incident was over. They were still to be friends.

So Jane, so lately Jane of the Parish Pump, found her days delightfully filled. The Park was looking its best that summer of halcyon weather; and people, tentatively as yet, after the upheaval of the War, were finding their way back to their old haunts. Girls, who had worked in hospitals and canteens and offices, were discovering afresh the pleasure of pretty clothes and recovered leisure. Young men, free at last of khaki, sunned themselves in mufti and a well-being that had the additional glamour of having been earned. There were scars, here and there crutches, an empty sleeve pinned to a breast or put neatly and flatly into a coat pocket. But there was, as in the grass and the trees and the richly flowering rhododendrons, an air of rebirth, or of an emerging from a winter of discontent. Something was over. Something was beginning.

Jane enjoyed her mornings in the Park as much as anything that an awakening London gave her. These mornings her old cousin shared with her. Daily, at eleven o'clock, his

taxi picked her up in Clarges Street, and put her down with him at Hyde Park Corner, where they crossed over to the Row. There, there followed the little ritual of choosing the chairs. Two armchairs, it must be. Ordinary chairs would not do, nor an armchair and an ordinary chair — though Jane, for her part, would have been content with an ordinary chair. They always made for, and often secured, the same two. But if these were occupied, or even one of them, they strolled till they found others. Then they sat and watched the passers-by.

It was inevitable, of course, that he should tell her of the Park as he remembered it in the days of its glory. He lent romance to the past and allowed none to the present, but she saw that this was his way of enjoying the present.

"You could put a name to people then," he said.

He told her of the beauties of those times — the Professional Beauties as they came to be called. Of Lady Dudley, of Lady Lonsdale, of Mrs. Langtry — beautiful still. People stood on chairs — he permitted himself that *cliché* — to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Langtry.

Everybody seemed to have been young then.

"There are young people now," Jane said, smiling.

"Picture postcards," he said contemptuously.

"But *they* were photographed," Jane said. "You could buy *them*. I've seen their photographs. Mother had some. Lady Dudley with a muff in a snowstorm."

"They weren't for the million. They had the decency to cost half-a-crown."

"Vulgar purse-proud old man," said Jane.

So they sparred and jested, and Jane loved him more and more. When she was with him she wanted no one of her own age. There was nothing they could not say to each other.

"If I were twenty years younger, I'd ask you to marry me," he said one day maliciously from one of the two armchairs.

"If I were twenty years older," said Jane, as maliciously, from the other, "I would."

She was revolving something in her head. She believed she would tell him one of these days of her adventure. Why not? She knew that she might with the certainty of his understanding. The thought had come to her on the night when she had dined with him in South Eaton Place. He was the sort of person to whom you could tell the things that you didn't tell. She knew exactly what he would say.

"You — a so-called respectable young woman!" and, almost in a breath, "What was he like?"

But she had not made up her mind yet. She

would be surrendering a part of what was to her a possession. She had, like a child, a secret. A secret shared ceased to be a secret, and she was not sure that she did not need a secret. Time enough, anyway. Meanwhile she amused herself and him by telling him about Ellen.

"That demure little maid of yours?"

"It's the demureness does it," Jane said.

"Or is it?" she said a moment or two later, "and is the demureness only there because of it — because of the conscious power? If you plumped her down in the middle of the desert, men would come up out of the ground."

"A dangerous quality in a maid. Is she a maid, by the bye?"

"A good girl," said Jane, "as surely as you're a bad man."

Presently she was asking him what her mother had been like as a girl.

"Not so very unlike this Ellen of yours. I know of at least half a dozen men who were in love with her. I saw a good deal of James Tremlet at one time, and I've always had a pretty shrewd suspicion that *he* was. He never married and he left her your house in the wilds."

"But she hardly knew him. I've often heard her say so. She was astonished when the letter came telling her of the will."

"I've discovered in the course of a long life that more people are in love with one — you, anybody — than one — you, again, anybody — would ever dream of. He was stationed at Colchester one summer, when your grandfather was in command there and his pretty daughter played havoc with the hearts of the young officers. Probably she took no notice of him. He was ten years older than she, and he probably just effaced himself and watched her enjoying herself. She didn't marry your father for some considerable time after that, though I believe there was a sort of engagement, but when she did he exchanged into an Indian regiment and probably left the army and settled down to his tea-planting. I don't suppose she ever saw him again, for, when he retired, it was to your back-of-beyond in Wales."

But this was a whole set of new ideas to Jane. Never before had a few sentences given her so much to think about. Her mother a breaker of hearts . . . a magnet for men . . . an Ellen? She had always known how pretty she must have been as a girl. She could see for herself, and there were photographs. Not, perhaps, with muffs and becoming snowstorms. But, and in spite of the bustles and bonnets, very pretty photographs. The early days of fringes. There was one with a young face and

a mob-cap. She had renounced her fringe as her pretty hair became grey. But how much more than a fringe, as she settled down to middle-age before its time — long before its time as things go now! — she must have renounced. Now, so short a time later, mothers, to sixty, say, — well, a generous fifty — were the same age as their daughters and wore the same or almost the same clothes. Was that — the elderliness of the clothes and of the appurtenances generally — why it had never before occurred to her to think of her mother and love! She remembered, as she came to think of it, a little way of her mother's with men; a different voice for them, was it? — something in the smile with which she greeted them? Little coquetries were there? — even at Aberllwyn, where there were no men. A sort of sprucing-up for the visits of the doctor? For a considerable part of Jane's life her mother must actually have been a young woman. Yet, the little graces apart, she had renounced. And how ungrudgingly, how unregretfully, how much as a matter of course! To be sure, most mothers then, as Jane had just reminded herself, did renounce. Still to have done it cheerfully after what had lain behind her of conquest, to have been able to do it uncomplainingly. But most surprising of all the thought of the conquests.

Yet, surprising? Why surprising? Why, in the name of all that was stupid and short-sighted, surprising? Her adorable mother. Her gracious, pretty, attractive mother. Surprising if knees had not bowed before her! What was really surprising was that her daughter should be surprised.

People passed and re-passed. It was like Brighton minus the bosoms.

Goodness! Her mother would have understood! She might have told her mother.

She could hear her as she had just heard her old cousin Abel:

"If there's nothing against him. If he should turn out all right. He sounds, from what you tell me, like a gentleman. He seems to have behaved admirably."

"You don't think I . . ."

"I think you behaved admirably too."

"Then I needn't have . . ."

So much for her own renunciation!

"What are you smiling at?"

"What you've just told me. At the idea of Mother having been in any way like Ellen."

She was growing accustomed to that idea, but she hadn't done thinking.

It all fitted in; linked up; explained. The little house, for instance. She had no doubt now that old James Tremlet, as old Abel Tremlet suggested, had been in love with her

mother. That certainly fitted in. She remembered that at her first sight of the house — the house of an old bachelor — she had seen, in the care and affection which had been lavished upon it, the care and affection which might have been lavished upon a wife. The house was his wife; more, the house was her mother!

"No wonder we were happy in it," she said to herself.

"You're still smiling," said Abel Tremlet. "You look extraordinarily pleased with yourself."

"I'm pleased with you," said Jane.

And she hadn't done even then, for there was something else that he had said.

More people were in love with you than, in your ignorance (or your modesty), you ever dreamed of? Was that true, too? She remembered what Mrs. Altringham had told her.

"Pleased, are you, to learn that your mother in her young days was a bit of a flirt? Is that it?"

Jane laughed out.

"You're a great deal too shrewd," she said.

"I should like to know what's in your head — what devilment, which I somehow seem to have justified, you are plotting."

"Oh, I was plotting, as you call it," Jane said, "long before I met you."

Uncannily shrewd. If she wasn't careful he would be guessing — more, divining — before she had made up her mind. Well, what matter? If she decided to tell him, that would make the telling easier. She continued to smile, but directed the talk to the passers-by. Always something there to justify any smile — a hat, or the pungency of a whiff of scent, or the shape of a pair of legs in relation to the length of a skirt.

"Yes, you're funny creatures," said Abel Tremlet.

Meanwhile, wherever she might be, Jane never lost sight of what she was 'out' for. Her eyes scrutinised, but without appearing to do so, the approaching or retreating form of any who by his proportions or his outline suggested the figure she remembered so well. She found the occupation — or rather the preoccupation, for it lay behind whatever she might be saying or doing — engrossing. Only occasionally, and rarely at that, did it make her inattentive or absent. For the most part, without difficulty or inconvenience, she was able to do two things at the same time. She would scan a street or a room or the auditorium of a theatre or a concert hall, without losing the sense of the immediate concerns of the moment. She was involved in a fascinating game

of chance which lent an interest and a glamour to her comings and goings. Nothing could be waste of time except the hours which she spent in her own rooms, for, into any other room, he, the object of her search, might conceivably walk at any minute. That there must, however, be such close times she recognised calmly, and experienced no restlessness if she passed an evening with her books or her work behind closed curtains. She slept the night through, but awoke every morning to the pleasant anticipation of the potentialities of the new day. It was not yesterday, then it might be to-day. If it was not to-day, it might be to-morrow. She had, in other words, always something to live by. If it was never, she would still have something to live by, something to carry her on, if need be, to a contented old age. The reproach was removed.

And that gave her a new thought. Her mother had been able to renounce because she had had something to renounce. She had not gravely minded her illness even, because, in her health, which was, incidentally, her youth, she had been satisfied. Life had not passed her by.

Now, at least, in no sense could life be said to be passing Jane by. Her youth, as she had realised, had been postponed, postdated. Here in London she had entered at last into her in-

heritance. There would, she knew, come a day when she would be homesick for her mountains and her waste spaces, her garden and the sanctuary of her little house, but that day was not yet. She was under the spell of the town.

One o'clock. The sound of the striking hour reached them from the tower of Saint Paul's Knightsbridge, but without that, Jane, accustomed now to the procedure of the Row, could have told to within a minute or two what the hour must be. People had begun to move. Chairs were emptying. You could have found vacant armchairs in couples where a few minutes ago hardly a chair had been unoccupied. The last of the riders had disappeared.

"You're coming back with me to luncheon."

"We'll take one more turn," Jane said — "as far as the Achilles."

It was her way of exhausting the possibilities of the place — any place — before she left it.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW field opened suddenly to Jane's activities.

"But I haven't danced for years," she said at the gate of it.

"Time you began again," said Mrs. Altringham. "You're a beautiful dancer. They all used to say so. Jimmy, whose strong point wasn't his dancing, if you remember, hardly dared to ask you. Algy Nicoll said . . ."

"But that was in the days of the waltzing. Rag-time wasn't invented. I've never even seen the new dancing."

"Time you did, then. Anyway, you're coming to dine and dance at Claridge's on Monday."

"You'll have me on your hands — and I've never been on anyone's hands at a dance."

"I shall have nothing of the sort. Besides, dancing at a hotel or a restaurant isn't a dance. Come round to dinner to-night, and Amy will put you through your paces. What's to-day? Tuesday. Why, you've nearly a week."

Jane accepted that invitation gladly. She could see how she got on.

"If I find I'm what they call a washout . . ."

But Mrs. Altringham would not listen.

"Eight o'clock," she said. She nodded, wagged her finger, and was gone.

"Well!" Jane said to herself as she went back to her room. "Well!" If a few weeks ago she had been told . . .!

Her first lesson might have disheartened her. She was accustomed to the flowing rhythms of the waltz, and she found herself baffled by the broken measures of a time that seemed to embody a sort of stumble in its beat.

"It's as easy as winking," Amy Altringham declared.

It certainly seemed to be as easy as winking when Amy did it. The music, even as played on the gramophone to which they were dancing, seemed to take hold of her. Her shoulders and her elbows and her hands moved to it when she sat down. She snapped the fingers of each hand alternately when she got up to dance.

"Easy as winking. Come along. Try again."

Jane was conscious enough of the insidious attraction of the time. She, too, felt it in its odd way to be inspiriting, inspiring, conceivably irresistible. She, too, listening and watching, felt the inclination to hitch first one shoulder, then the other to a lilt that stirred your pulses and your muscles and your nerves. She could understand what it was that, during the years in which she had not danced, had

set the world dancing-mad. But, with all that, her nimble feet, trained to gliding, failed to catch the subtleties of the time and express them. She laughed at her attempts, but ruefully. What was it? What was it that this younger girl could do and that she could not? What was it that eluded her? Was it her ear that was at fault, or her feet?

"It's because you can waltz," Amy said.

She was to learn that that was true. She was to learn, moreover, that not one in ten of Amy's generation, the generation that had grown up as it were to rag-time, could waltz. They had their own waltz, of course, but to Jane their waltz was a degenerate thing danced rather against the natural rhythm than with it.

"You see," she said to Mrs. Altringham, who had come into the room. "What did I tell you?"

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Altringham. "You're not going to let yourself be beaten."

No, that was just it. She was not going to let herself be beaten. She was on her mettle. In spite, therefore, of the tentative stipulation she had made, she knew now that before the evening was over, she was going to accept Mrs. Altringham's invitation — and to be able, moreover, to dance, and to dance well, when the evening arrived! Her failure to master not so much the actual steps as the

spirit of them had had the exactly opposite effect to that which was to have determined her decision. Because she had failed, she was going to succeed.

"I'm more stupid," she said, smiling, "than I could have believed, but between this and Monday . . . Tell me who to go to."

Amy Altringham wrote down an address.

"I'll ring her up in the morning. I'll dance by Monday if I have to have lessons all day."

"That's right," said Mrs. Altringham; "but it will come to you, you'll find, quite suddenly."

It did — though not the next day. In spite of bobbed-haired "Very good's," not the next day.

"Walk. Walk. Very good. Again. No. You're waltzing! Walk. Walk. That's better. Watch me. One two . . . The right foot, Miss Weston. No, watch. The right foot. That's your left. Such feet, too, for dancing! If you could see some of the feet we have to deal with. Now. Walk. That's better! Very good. Very good. *No!*"

"Shall I ever get it?" said Jane.

"The minute you forget what you've been used to."

It was what Amy Altringham had said in other words.

"Now again. Wait for the beat. Wait. Feel it. One moment. Perhaps one of the older tunes, Miss Hodson. 'Every Sunday Morning.' Yes," she hummed: "'Every Sunday *morn*ing'" (click! — a sort of hiccough pause which a veritable *hic* might have filled!) — "'when the weather's fine . . .' You see? You see what I mean? You've got to feel the syncopation. Now."

Infinite bobbed-haired patience. How wonderful this patience! And how stupid of you (Jane) that this patience should be necessary!

"Very good," Bobbed-hair's last words that day.

"Very bad!" Jane's own comment as she walked back to Clarges Street. But the very next day! And in the middle of the lesson. In the twinkling of an eye. Quite, quite suddenly she had it. It would be Mrs. Altringham's turn, when she heard and saw, to say, 'What did I tell you?'

It was a question of surrender, of forgetting, of giving yourself up to the insidious lilt of the music and letting it control you. She wanted to snap her fingers now like Amy, to hitch her shoulders alternately as Amy did — not, of course, when she was actually dancing, but when the music struck up.

Bobbed-hair looked at her with approval tinged with the faintest element of surprise.

"I knew you were a dancer. With those feet how could you be anything else? But have you been practising all night?"

Jane smiled and shook her head.

"Unless I've been practising in my sleep," she said.

"That's very probably what you have been doing."

The rest was plain sailing. Bobbed-hair, as pleased as her pupil, went on to fresh and more elaborate steps. Jane picked them up. No longer was her left foot where her right should have been, no longer the foot which was needed for the next step the foot on which she was balanced. No longer had she to be told to wait for the beat, to feel it. She felt it. And, with that, there had come to her an understanding of what people 'saw' in rag-time; of what it was, in the strange throb of it, that did set feet and shoulders and elbows moving at the sound of it. She understood. More, she experienced. It was as if her eyes and her ears had been opened to something the existence of which she had not suspected. What? Something disintegrating? Dope-like? Morally undermining? That, too, perhaps. Well, you didn't condemn wine because, in the abuse of it, it could be intoxicating.

Bobbed-hair asked her, as her old Tremlet cousin had lately had occasion to ask her, what

she was smiling at. But though she continued to smile, she would not enlighten her any more than she had enlightened him. A couple of lines from one of Ellen's many songs had come ridiculously into her head:

"I don't care what becomes of me
When they start playing that sweet melodee . . ."

She wasn't prepared to admit to Bobbed-hair — though she liked her — that she could understand that abandonment might go as far as that! She had learnt, she was thinking, more, in the last half-hour, than the mastery of a few steps.

Her smile lingered about her lips for the rest of her lesson. She continued her lessons, which now became practice, to the end of the week.

"I don't know," Bobbed-hair said at the end of the last — "I don't know that I've ever had a quicker pupil."

So it came that a light-hearted but level-headed Jane dined and danced at Claridge's Hotel on the following Monday night, acquitted herself admirably, enjoyed herself greatly, and only, at odd and unexpected moments, asked herself, at a sudden throw-back to the Jane of Aberllwyn, what in the world she was doing in that galley.

CHAPTER VII

Thus — asking herself, sometimes, like the old woman of the nursery rhyme who woke up to find her petticoats cut off, whether this, indeed, were she — Jane, equipped for dancing, found dancing coming her way. One thing led to another. There might be no season to speak of in that year of transition rather than grace, no awnings, no link-men, no red carpets laid down across strips of pavement from roadways to hall-doors, but behind drawn blinds there was a great deal of dancing. In deference to disturbed conditions generally, and even to depleted pockets, sandwiches, cups, lemonades had taken the place of the hot quails and champagnes of the pre-War days, but nobody seemed to mind. The hostesses of the year were not asked to meet each other at the Benedicks' Club in Piccadilly, and no lists of their prospective entertainments appeared in the columns of the "Times" or the "Morning Post." Dancing, for dancing's sake, the order of the night. A good band and a good floor saw the dancers of 1920 satisfied.

Mrs. Altringham was a friend to some purpose. An informal invitation on a visiting-card would reach Jane, or she would be rung

up on the telephone. The evening at Claridge's had provided her at the outset with three or four young men on whom to draw when she was bidden to bring a man.

She had young men to bow to in the Park. They would stop and talk to her. If there was a vacant chair, one or another of them would join her and her old cousin, who would be restive or amused. Actually, he was as pleased as she was at the signs of her popularity.

"Not," he said, "that I don't see the end of it. This is the way these things begin. Young women without chaperons tearing round London all night with goodness knows whom, at goodness knows what hours. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No," said Jane. "But I'm modest enough still to be a little bit surprised."

"And where are you dancing to-night, may I ask?"

"I'm not dancing to-night."

"Then you'll put on your prettiest frock and we'll have this night-out that we've talked about. I'll show some of these young men of yours that they can't have it all their own way. The old man's turn, my dear. I'll telephone for a table at the Savoy."

"It will be you," Jane said, "not they, who will turn my head."

So at a quarter-past eight that evening

Jane, in her prettiest frock, sat down to a carefully chosen dinner tête-à-tête with her old cousin and added to her experiences. He had seen to everything himself, leaving nothing, after all, to the telephone or chance — booked the particular table he wanted, ordered his dinner and his wine. Jane and he were waved to their places by bowing waiters. He had tipped, it was probable, in advance.

Grapefruit to begin with, cool, juicy, whetting the appetite for what was to follow; soup that was like liquid amber, pale-golden; sole that was pale gold too without, but whitest white within and that melted on your tongue; quails; saddle of mutton, peas, little potatoes that looked as if they too were made of gold; asparagus; *pêches Melba* for her, though not too obviously a concession to her younger taste; for himself some sort of savoury; strawberries: this the modest but excellent dinner he provided. She did justice to the courses and did not protest when her glass was replenished with champagne, but contented herself with refusing a liqueur with her coffee.

"I think," she said, "you'll have to come down and stay with me at Aber-me-what-you-may-call-it."

"My dear, I never get farther than Brighton."

But the idea pleased him and he played with it.

"My old bones," he said, "rattled over your mountains! You'd drive me about in a governess-cart, I suppose. I know. A thing like a clothes-basket in which you sit sideways with no room for your legs. And when we went uphill, you'd make me get out and walk, and when we went downhill, you'd keep me shifting my seat to balance what wouldn't be balanced."

"Nonsense. I'd hire a car for you. I'd even meet you at Newtown. Will you come?"

"I'll think about it. Who's your friend?"

For Jane had caught the passing eye of one of two persons who were threading their way to a table. The eye would have passed unseeingly, but Jane had made a point of catching it with her most radiant smile.

"Someone I'm very grateful to. I call her Bobbed-hair."

"One of your new dancing friends, I suppose."

"Exactly. But better than that. She taught me."

"And the young blood she has in tow? The commissionnaire who opens the door? — or one of her pupils? In these days it might be either. Well, well, the commissionnaire, I suppose, might be one's nephew, and the

pupil the son of one's bootmaker. A topsy-turvy world, my dear, a topsy-turvy world, whatever you may say, but I suppose it still goes round."

"That's, perhaps, what we've got to learn, Cousin Abel."

In other respects, to look about, there might never have been a war. There was something heartening, nevertheless, something even admirable, in the outward cheerfulness of the scene. Jane found the lights and the flowers and the dresses of the women exhilarating. The men, if you looked for changes, were still for the most part in black ties and dinner-jackets — here and there one or two not in evening dress at all — but the general aspect was unchanged, though cataclysms had rent the world and were still threatening civilisation, and Jane, in optimistic mood, saw, in that, one more sign of England's fundamental sanity. Her old cousin might pretend to grumble; she was enjoying herself — and so was he.

"And when, may I ask, do you propose that I should adventure myself into your wilds?"

"When I go back."

"And when will that be?"

"Cousin Abel, I don't know!"

"You *have* got something — I've said so all along — up your sleeve."

Jane looked at her pretty white arm.

"We're not allowed much sleeve," she said, "are we?" — and tock a strawberry from the dish in front of her, and a smiling survey of the room.

"You've the good taste, though, to have some, I see. Enough to hide a secret in anyway."

But, in the interval between, almost, one of his words and the next and, uncannily, as if to point them, something had happened to Jane. He had, he thought, heard her catch her breath. She was still smiling, but the smile seemed arrested on her face, from which the colour was now slowly ebbing. The strawberry she held did not reach her mouth, but, as if by its weight, drew her hand down to her plate, where it slipped from releasing fingers. Something or someone she had seen? He looked from her hand, the slow fall of which he had unconsciously followed, to the middle of the room — the direction of her eyes with their fixed smile — to where a party of diners had risen from a table. As he did so, one of these, looking about her, turned, as it seemed to him, into someone he knew, caught at the same moment his searching eye, nodded and smiled, and, with a word over her shoulder to one of the others, threaded her way amongst the intervening tables toward his table. Betty.

But Jane did not know Betty, could not, without a clue, have recognised her from even his description of her, devilish as it had been. Not Betty, then, who became, before she reached him, an irritating red-herring dragged across a scent. Betty was thus no more than an interruption, and the cause, whatever it was, of Jane's patent disturbance remained unexplained. And — or but — so amazing were women, something further had happened to Jane, or rather within Jane, who in this new interval had regained complete possession of herself, and who was able now, as was plain from the twinkle in her eye, to recognise the approaching figure before it came to a halt and he made the introduction.

What had happened? What had she seen or what did she still see that he did not? For all that was visible to her was visible to him: a group of persons standing about a table, beginning to move from it, with glances in the direction of the strayed Betty. Four men, three women — the lingering Betty, the fourth woman, completing the original eight. None of these showed signs of any corresponding emotion to that which had affected, and was still, he believed, under her regained composure, affecting Jane. Mistress of herself as she was now, with placid eyes and the colour back in her cheeks, she was yet, he could have sworn, controlling some excitement.

Betty was talking in her slow, dropping voice, saying the same thing over again in different words, with appeals to Jane on whom she was smiling graciously. He in that galley! The last person in the world! What spell had Miss Weston cast to get him there?

"No spell at all," said Jane, looking at him affectionately; "Mr. Tremlet asked me."

"A greater spell than you know, then. Mine have been quite useless. And I've tried."

Jane's eyes, he saw, went back to the middle of the room. The group had left the table and was dispersing, strealing, Indian file, towards the stairs. One man was waiting, lighting a fresh cigarette, not looking in Betty's direction — just waiting.

Betty glanced over her shoulder.

"Oh, wretches, they're going. I must go. I'd nothing to say, but I had to come over and say it." She gave Jane her hand. "We shall meet again, I hope."

"Bring little Geoffrey to see me," said Mr. Tremlet. "I'd like Miss Weston to see him. To-morrow at tea-time? Are you free to-morrow, Jane?"

Jane was free; Betty, of course, could not remember, but thought she was free. Anyway, Geoffrey was free.

"To-morrow, then."

She joined the man who was waiting for her. Jane's eyes followed the pair to the staircase, Mr. Tremlet's eyes following Jane's. When hers returned to his, his were waiting for them and held them.

But all she said was, "So that's Betty."

"Yes," he said, "that's Betty," and waited.

"She's very pretty," she said presently, "extraordinarily pretty. You didn't tell me she had such a beguiling voice. She could get round anybody with that voice — except, perhaps, you, Cousin Abel?"

"Oh, she has all the beguilements. And plenty of acumen. She's no fool, Betty. She thought you worth while, I may tell you. Did you see that?"

"I saw that she thinks you worth while, as you call it."

"I'm her father-in-law with five years, say, to live."

Jane said nothing.

He drew a bow at a venture.

"I wonder who that was *she* had in tow."

Jane looked at him.

"Had she anyone in tow?"

"They wait for her," he said shortly.

But the idea pleased him and he played with it, as, a few minutes earlier, he had played with another idea which had pleased him.

"'They also serve,'" he murmured, "'who only stand and wait.'"

Jane seemed to bethink her of her strawberry, gave it her attention and ate it, ate it slowly, dipping it twice, before she had consumed it, into the cream on her plate. He watched her, chuckling at his thought.

"'They also serve,' he said again. "They pay their shot in waiting, though! Waiting about. I'll swear they do."

"You're very malicious," she said at last.

He could not tell whether he touched her; apparently not, for she was now, for some unguessable reason, in buoyant spirits. Her eyes were sparkling, her cheeks were pink; she was like a child at a party — a child, a little above itself, at a party.

"I suppose you know that *I'm* waiting," he said.

"No," she said. "No! I haven't made up my mind." She shook her head, laughing. "I can't be rushed. I must think. If I told you I should be, in a sort of way" — she gave a little vague gesture — "exposed, committed. This much I may tell you: someone who, I thought, might be dead isn't dead. Isn't dead. Your bringing me here to-night has given me that knowledge. For the moment that's enough for me. More than enough. It must be enough for you, Cousin Abel."

"My dear, if you're happy . . ."

"I think I was never so happy in my life."

So far, at least, she would commit herself. She owed it to her beloved host to let him know what, howsoever indirectly, he had done for her. But now she wanted to get home; to be alone; to think. She must not let him suspect that. But he did. Her attention wandered in spite of her. The music. The insinuating conspiracy of the band. The "Casse Noisette Suite." "Avalon" — new then. Sibelius's "Valse Triste."

"Now, my dear. I keep early hours."

She knew that he did not.

"About to-morrow morning," he said in the taxi. "The Park? or not the Park to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "Why not? Eleven as usual."

More than ever the Park to-morrow she was thinking — the Park or anywhere else. In all London it was the Savoy alone that for that evening was exhausted of its possibilities. Exhausted because it had fulfilled them. If only one could be everywhere — and everywhere else! — at the same moment. He was somewhere within a mile or two of her at this moment. He was dancing, perhaps — the party had evidently been going on to some-

thing — dancing, perhaps with Betty? 'I left my heart in Avalon . . .'

"Of course the Park to-morrow morning," she said.

They were turning into Clarges Street; approaching her door.

"Dear Cousin Abel," she said, "you've given me such a wonderful evening."

She put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"God bless you, dear."

"That's just it," she said triumphantly, for she saw now that she would probably, though not inevitably, have to tell him. "He has blessed me — through you."

She let herself in with her latchkey and rang for Ellen; but only to tell her that she could go to bed. She submitted, at Ellen's protest, to having her dress changed for a dressing-gown that Ellen might at least brush her hair, but curtailed the long process on the plea of a fatigue which was the last thing in the world she was feeling, and thus dismissed her as soon as might be.

Alone now to think. *Enfin, seule?* That was just what she wasn't, with the inestimable possession which was hers. She would never be alone any more. Not dead! The years and the War had spared him. Living, breathing,

and in London — somewhere (once more) within a mile or two of her at that very moment. Nothing mattered now that she knew he wasn't dead. They would meet, that was certain. If she did not know anything else, she knew that. It had not been for nothing that Ellen had sung her 'Oh, isn't it a pity such a pretty girl as I.' (Pretty? The looking-glass. She turned on all the lights and stood before it gazing at herself. She was pretty. Oh, she was pretty to-night if she had never been pretty before — or even thought of her looks. . . . Pretty enough, anyway. Her old cousin thought her pretty.) And it had not been for nothing that she had gone to tea at Miss Rod's of the Bank to ask herself what *she* was doing in *that* galley! Above all, it had been for something, indeed, that, on the top of the gentle festivities of Miss Rod's party, Mr. Morgan's intentions had found ultimate expression in the letter which, bringing everything to a head, had sent her forth into the peopled world. There *was* a tide which taken at the flood . . .

Walking up and down her room she lived again and again breathlessly through the wonderful evening. The moment of recognition. The moment when her heart had almost ceased to beat. Had she made any sound? The 'Was it?' 'Was it?' 'Could it be?' —

phrases which she had smiled at when she came upon them in the novels of the day before the day before yesterday, and which she now found to be true. 'Could it be?' Her heart had resumed its beating only at the incontestable evidence of her eyes that It Indeed Was. Her senses, for just three moments — stretched, as the dead-and-gone novels said, to an eternity — had reeled, and she had been in danger of fulfilling the rest of the obsolete procedure by fainting. But she had not fainted. She had even reasoned, been able to reason, and to see that the knowledge which had come to her was all-sufficing. It was thus that she had been able to give her attention to the approaching form and recognise it for Betty. It was thus, resting on her knowledge as on oars, that she had been able to attend to Betty, to be interested even in meeting Betty. She could, as it were, spare her attention now that she knew that her dream was of a living being. She could wait.

An old song suddenly, of her mother's — not of Ellen's this time! She and her mother often and often had smiled over the sentiment of it. ("My dear, I used to think it lovely.")

"Some day, some day, some day I shall meet you.
Love, I know not when nor how, Love, I know not when nor how:
Only this, only this . . ."

(her mother used to burlesque the fervour with which she had sung it in its day) —

" . . . this, that once you loved me . . ."

And it, too, was true, like the ridiculous 'Could-it-be's'! True, perhaps, all the ridiculousnesses that you laughed at when you were heart-whole and didn't know. Written for her actually. And was she stumbling upon a discovery — the secret of all the cheap popularities? That somehow they applied? Or that, if they didn't apply, there were thousands of hungry souls who wanted them to apply? We might rule it out, but there it was; universal; basic. 'I left my heart in Avalon' — Brighton? Bathos! Oh, one could laugh! 'Every little while' — one could laugh at oneself. 'Every little while I feel so lonely.' 'You made me love you' — even that! 'I didn't want to do it . . .'

She was laughing, tears in her eyes; and then, before she knew that she was going to cry, she was crying her heart out — of sheer happiness.

CHAPTER VIII

THE morning; the Park; sunshine. And nothing happened. A more beautiful morning even than the beautiful mornings which had preceded it had brought everybody out. There were more riders than usual, more strollers, more sitters in the twopenny chairs to criticise the riders, the horseflesh, and the passers-by. Jane wore a new hat and was pleased with herself. For so many years she had spent so little on clothes that she could afford to indulge herself. The blue of her linen dress was repeated in her parasol and ultimately in the sky overhead. Her old cousin, in concession to the day, wore sponge-bag trousers and even a grey bowler, which, in combination, gave him a sporting air which Jane found very attractive.

"But I've made up my mind," she said suddenly, à propos of nothing unless it was of the light-heartedness which she was feeling — "I've made up my mind that I'm not going to tell you. You must forgive me this, Cousin Abel, dear. You're quite right. I have my pretty secret, but I'm going to keep it till — till I see. Till I see, do you see? When I

see — if I see — you shall know. You shall know the whole thing without reservations."

"Right you are, my dear. You shall do exactly as you like."

"If I did that," Jane said, "I'd be telling you this very moment."

And there they left it. There was everything else in the world to talk of, and they talked, or were silent and just basked. You could bask in comfort in London. No flies to worry you. No midges to remind you, as they did even in her blessed Welsh garden, that you would pay for your basking. Only in towns, after all, and at the seaside, could you sit out of doors in complete peace. Rightly, as she often thought in her wonderful walks through the woods and over the hills at Aberllwyn, had the accursed flies of a fly-ridden country Beelzebub to their King.

"Becoming a town-bird, are you?"

"Nothing of the sort. There's no comparison. If you saw — as you will see — the beauty of my hills! But you *can*, I say, sit out in London."

A momentary nostalgia seizing her, she abandoned the point and expatiated upon her hills and her valleys; thence, generally, upon the country of her adoption — as much of it, that is, as she herself knew.

"Scenery! Have you seen the Happy Valley,

may I ask, behind Aberdovey? Have you seen the road from Dolgelly to Barmouth? Have you seen the Great Orme's Head? You go abroad, and these things are at your gates, and you lump them together under a complacent Aber-me-anything-you-please."

"Bless the child. Does she think I've never been in Wales? Indeed to goodness! And who was talking of 'Abroad'? Who was talking of 'Abroad,' at all? To say nothing of 'Abroad' to the disparagement of one square yard of the British Isles. Never did I hear such an unprovoked attack in the course of my born days!"

But Jane, as he knew, was only attacking herself for being so happy in London.

A minute later she was expatiating upon London. Her walks, alone or with Ellen, had freshly discovered it for her. Little hidden bits of it — those were what she loved most. You came upon things behind things. Pickering Place with its sundial behind Saint James's Street. You might pass that a thousand times without so much as guessing that it was there. But it was there. She had proved it. Bits of Soho, with fanlights over the doors, and flat windows. If she lived in London and could live where she liked, it would not be Belgrave Square that she would choose to live in, or Grosvenor Square, or even, perhaps, Carlton

House Terrace, but some little forgotten, hidden, overlooked place round which, as round an island, the big stream of London washed, but that for its hiddenness you must find for yourself. Park Row in Knightsbridge, on which she had chanced in her rambles, was such a spot. Clifford's Inn such another. The Temple, of course. Bits of Chelsea. Not the new big houses. The old ones. The ones that dated from the time when Chelsea was a village.

"One of these days you'll find the house of your dreams," said her cousin, "and you'll take it."

"But I've got the house of my dreams," said Jane.

"Another, in London."

"I wonder," said Jane.

She too could play with an idea. She played with this. It would be fun to look for and to find such a house; fun altering and decorating it to suit her needs and views; fun, more fun still, greatest fun of all, perhaps, raking dusty out-of-the-way shops for old furniture to fit it. For that, even if she could, she would not go to Bond Street. She would no more go to Bond Street than she would go to Tottenham Court Road. What fun to buy what had been found for you? To find what had already been found? None. The fun was in the finding.

You must find for yourself. In byways, markets, the backs of obscure shops. Who, if not she, knew the pleasures of search?

And so that was even at the back of all this. That was at the back of the exquisite beauty even of the day. What the night before had given her. And she could be ungrateful enough not to share her joy with the indirect instrument of the gift of it!

"Some day I *will* tell you," she said, as suddenly as, a few minutes since, she had told him that, for the present at least, she had made up her mind not to.

"Well, that's a bargain. But I may tell you that when you do — if you do — there will be sympathy for you and, what's more than sympathy, comprehension. There, make your mind easy. The old man is not waiting any longer, or rather he's content to wait the young woman's very good pleasure, and she mustn't feel, even at the back of her mind, as she seems to be doing, that she owes him any explanation whatever."

"Bless him," said Jane with one of her glows of affection.

They parted at a quarter-past one, and at half-past four she was with him in South Eaton Place.

She was now keenly eager to see Betty again. Betty was a link. With her eagerness,

but not surmounting it, there was yet a very real aversion to the thought of Betty as a link. She wanted nothing from Betty, in one sense; in another, she knew that she wanted everything. But she could trust herself not to use her. However much tempted she might be, she could count upon herself not, by word or deed, to seek to glean from her one shred of the information she desired so ardently to possess. She might take, like Napoleon, her goods where she found them; she would ask no questions, angle for no answer to questions she did not ask. If ever it came to fighting — well, that would be a different matter, but she could be confident that, even then, she would remember that all was not fair, whatever the proverb might say, in love or in war.

The betting was, her old cousin said, that Betty would not turn up.

"She thought she could," Jane reminded him.

"My dear, that's why."

Tea was ready-laid in the drawing-room; a little table at which the little boy could sit, specially for Geoffrey; a little chair placed in readiness before it. Grandfatherly foresight, she saw, had provided a large jug of milk and sponge cakes.

"She'll send Geoffrey; and his nurse, you'll see, will have a note for me."

They exchanged twinkling glances when,

five minutes later, all fell out as he prophesied, and he handed the note to her.

Betty was desolated. She had forgotten that she was motoring with some tiresome people to the Guards' Club, that afternoon, at Maidenhead.

"I was to say how very particularly and sorry Mrs. Tremlet was, sir."

"Just so, nurse, thank you. Now, if you'll go down and have your tea with Mrs. Johnson, we'll ring for you when Master Geoffrey's tired of us — or we're tired of you, Geoffrey, eh? One or other's sure to happen. Which will it be?"

"*We* know which that will be, don't we, Master Geoffrey? But be a good boy now, and don't tire your grandpapa too soon. Just the leastest drop of tea in his milk he may have for a treat, but no currants, sir, I beg of you."

Jane, making friends with Geoffrey, saw that his nurse and his grandfather understood each other.

"This is your new cousin, Geoffrey. Come and stand on the ottoman so that she may have a good look at you."

Geoffrey did as he was told. When he had clambered on to the piece of furniture which was to make his platform, he stood sturdily and unabashed, laughing into their faces.

"H'm. Proud of yourself up there, aren't you! On your pedestal nearly as tall as your old grandfather, I declare!"

But it was the old man who was proud. His quizzical eyes drew Jane's attention to this one or that of the little fellow's points, as a dog-fancier to those of a pedigree pup, or a breeder of horses to those of the pick of his stud; the strong shapely little legs, the firm body, the plump but slender wrists, the small ears close to the head.

"Cupid," Jane said.

"Isn't he? Isn't he?" Mr. Tremlet was delighted. "Mercury later on."

Geoffrey, an eye on Johnson who had appeared with the teapot, wanted to know who Cupid was.

"A little demon who makes most of the mischief in this world. Johnson, if you don't believe me, will bear me out."

Johnson said, "That's so, Master Geoffrey," and withdrew.

"Who's — Mer — Merkery?"

"A messenger, like you when you bring notes to your grandfather to say that your mother can't come."

"That was Nurse, not me, and Mumsie could have. Uncle Peter said so in the car. But Mumsie said No. A ningagement was a ningagement."

Mercifully old Abel Tremlet laughed and gave Jane her cue to laugh also, for her heart had leapt. Had she a part of what she wanted? Not that way did she wish to get what she wanted — not from prattling of Betty's son. But, whether she would or no, she had now, once for all, what the innocent lips had let fall; and she could not help the way of its coming. Peter; something to call him by. She might, of course, be wildly astray and 'Peter' might stand for anyone else in the world. But she was sure she was not astray. The 'tiresome people' of Betty's ingratiating note had covered for her, even as she read it, someone who was not tiresome. She knew enough of Betty, she thought, to know that this would but be Betty's way. Peter then. Her apprehension that the boy's grandfather would ask who 'Uncle Peter' might be, amounted to an agony of conflicting terror and desire. Extraordinarily, as it seemed to her, he did not, and the dreadful moment passed.

"Your mother was quite right," he said. "A ningagement's a ningagement. Remember that through your life, my boy. Now, what do you say to tea?"

Actually it was perhaps what Geoffrey said to tea that relieved and cheated her, for, diverting a dangerous current, it saved and lost the situation.

"Grace?" he hazarded, and, clambering down, bounded to the table. "For what we are going to receive" — shut eyes, hands pressed together — "the Lord make us truly," he paused; they waited; "truly — and thankful."

Afterwards she could wonder, and regret, that the moment had passed and that the question had not been asked. In the natural sequence of things the asking had seemed inevitable. 'And who, pray, is Uncle Peter?' or, as she had conceived the form the question would take on the whimsical old lips, 'Who may Uncle Peter be?' Many uncles, probably, poor, or lucky, little Geoffrey! So many, perhaps, that Betty's father-in-law was uninterested. The name, though she listened for it, did not crop up again. She was glad and sorry; afterwards, wholly sorry.

CHAPTER IX

She saw him again. At the theatre one night and again with Betty. A passing glimpse as the audience came out. She was living now in a strange state of excitement, and sometimes really wished for her Welsh hills. For hours together she would put the thought of him from her. She would go deliberately to parts of London where it would be unlikely that she would see him. She took Ellen with her and explored such outlying districts as Highgate or Whitechapel or Putney. The wonder of London increased. Highgate: Dick Whittington; traces of him still; the name Fitzwarren, for instance, to take her back to pantomimes of her childhood; Holly Lodge; Harriet Mellon, Mrs. Coutts, Duchess of Saint Albans. She stood with Ellen on the viaduct and saw the town spread before her like a map. Goodness, what a view! The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Did her mountains give her anything more wonderful? The Tower Bridge, shipping in the Docks, the Tower itself, Saint Paul's, distant Westminster, the winding river, always the winding river, and houses and houses and

houses, and, beyond those, houses almost to the line of the distant hills. What a town!

"Doesn't seem hardly credible," Ellen said, "that anything could be so big, 'm, does it?"

It didn't. And somewhere in all that, the thought forced itself, Peter!

But she had come there not to think of Peter.

Ellen detached her thoughts from him.

"It's like 'ever and ever Amen,' 'm."

Jane, smiling, said that it was like that.

"Not the Tower of Babel — asking for a 'judgment'?"

"Oh, no, 'm. The other way. Gives you confidence."

The right way to look at it. Yes, and it did give you confidence. Not a challenge, this, but rather a monument of human industry and endeavour. Cell upon cell, like the humble industrious work of bees. And, in quite another sense also, it gave you confidence, as, in the big squares, the work of the plasterers and painters had already given her confidence. Not in this sensible London, with its myriad homes and its interlaced interests, would the seeds of disaffection find lasting root. Never, at the desire of the destroyers, would these houses burst into flame, or these streets run with blood. Jane, there because she was restless, felt her restlessness passing.

"How shall we ever settle back, 'm!"

"Nonsense," she said, sensible as London. "It's because we've seen all this that we *shall* settle back." But actually she was not so sure, and sent a thought to the little hidden house (somewhere, like Peter, in all that) that her cousin had prophesied she would one day find waiting for her.

"If I thought we were unsettling ourselves — either of us — I'd take you back to-morrow."

"There, 'm, I'm only talking," Ellen said demurely.

For that day Jane's spirits had risen again — as if it had been the apprehension of a judgment of God, or of an impending revolution, which had oppressed them! But in the course of the week she was again driven afield, and not only Whitechapel but Putney, together with Chiswick and Hammersmith, had to contribute to her diversion. In each case she found temporarily the distraction she needed. Whitechapel, seething with a native and an alien life; cockney, Yiddish; strange names over the shops; barrows piled with vegetables and fruit; children dancing to an organ; women with long foreign eyes; the busts of Brighton. Putney; the river again; old houses. Chiswick Mall: Miss Pinkerton's, Becky Sharp, Amelia Sedley, the Dixonary.

Hammersmith: trams, omnibuses, people; a little hidden theatre which had made itself famous. Yes, you could find distractions.

So, with fluctuating spirits, Jane went her strange way. The search, of course, proceeded, but, with the knowledge that the object of it verily existed, its character had wholly changed. It was fraught now with an element of apprehension that had been absent when she had supposed that there might be nothing to find. It was as if a game of chance, in which she had lightly taken a hand, had become a thing of deadly earnest with stakes which had increased to a point of terror. In the street, sometimes, she would shrink from turning a corner for the very dread of what the next street might hold. The face of Peter amongst the faces. Faces! Faces! Every sort of face, and she had to look at them all!

More than once she thought she saw him, and when that happened her blood would turn to water and her knees tremble. But as she came near, forcing herself to come near, the face she had seen would change into another, quite different, perhaps; or, perhaps, showing a superficial resemblance to his. And then she would be relieved. More; she would feel as if she had been granted a reprieve. For what was she going to do if indeed she should see him?

Betty for her part lay low. After the cordiality of her manner at their meeting, Jane had half-expected a visit of ceremony from her. But Jane hardly realised how completely the old order of social amenities had passed. Betty's generation lived for the moment and amused itself. If it wanted you, it rang you up, or it blew in upon you as it passed. It did not bother itself with ritual, did not trouble itself even to leave cards if you had entertained it; had not cards at all, very probably. When it had accepted your invitation, you might think yourself fortunate if it did not fail you at the last moment. So a visit from Betty would depend upon Betty's mood. Jane saw that she need not have hoped that Betty would not call upon her. She dreaded Betty now as, in a way, she dreaded Peter. Looking into her heart, which loved Geoffrey, she found that she even dreaded *him*.

And so the days passed. A spell of bad weather had put a stop to the mornings in the Park. You sat and you shivered — or your companion shivered if he was of the age of her old cousin — and presently you did not attempt to go. That put Jane's mornings on her hands. She did not know what to do with them. She sat at home and worked or read; sometimes she just sat. Those were the worst

days — those on which she just sat. For it was then that her thoughts had her at their mercy.

What were Peter's relations with Betty? What did she wish them to be? Abel Tremlet had told her pretty plainly his opinion of Betty, and had implied, almost as plainly, what such relations might mean. Peter, then, if he was involved, as seemed only too probable, might be her suitor — in good faith her suitor — or her lover or potentially her lover. An alternative of evils in the contemplation of which her heart sickened. It was not only for herself that her heart grew sick. If her cousin was right in his estimation of Betty, woe betide the successful suitor!

At a certain point she had to push thought from her. She could only wait. And then, numb, exhausted, she would sit with closed eyes, not even thinking.

And then, for no reason, or for small reasons, that mood would pass also. She would sleep and wake to cheerfulness and hopefulness. Or a dance would come along for her beguilement, and, as the evening wore on and the fear of his appearance subsided and allowed her to feel safe, she would yield herself to an enjoyment that never failed her, and her mind and her body would have re-

freshment. For strangely, — oh, surely, passing strangely! — she did not want to see him. And so, by degrees, she recovered something of her calm.

The season, meanwhile, was waning. The Row, when once more better weather permitted the morning saunterings and sittings, showed a thinned attendance. But Peter, it was plain, like Betty, did not go to the Park in the morning, and there she felt a sort of false security. Henley was approaching; the two matches, the 'Varsity and the Eton and Harrow. To the first of these functions she was committed. She had accepted, long since, Mrs. Altringham's invitation to Phyllis Court for the third day of the regatta, and 'a ningagement was a ningagement.' She need not go to the matches. Nothing definite had been settled about either of them, though old Abel Tremlet had spoken of taking her to both. But she knew that she should go to them. If only because, there, the danger of seeing Peter would be greatest of all, and the hours spent in the stands or on the crowded paths and lawns would not give her an easy moment, she knew that she should go to them. There were tortures which carried their own solace. There was, anyway, no turning back.

CHAPTER X

BUT before Henley came along something happened. As she had so often pictured herself coming face to face with Peter, she came, one day, face to face with Betty. Of all the spots in London where it was conceivable that such an encounter might take place, in the least desirable — in Lansdowne Passage, that narrow, deep-sunk channel connecting Curzon Street with Berkeley Street, and running uncompromisingly between the high walls of the gardens of Lansdowne and Devonshire Houses. She saw and recognised Betty before Betty saw her. The sound of their converging footsteps — magnified by the acoustics of the passage so that the ring, even, of Betty's heels, on the pavement had a quality of sharpness that was clearly detectable (and that incidentally proclaimed them higher than her own) — reverberated as sounds reverberate in a tunnel. Betty, whom she wished to avoid! Bother of bothers! There was no help for it, however; no shelter, nor, short of turning tail and scuttling — the last thing Jane would have thought of doing — any means of escape.

The two advancing figures approached each other. The narrow tunnel held for the mo-

ment no one but themselves. Betty, she perceived, was preoccupied and looked at the ground as she walked. It was just possible, if she did not raise her eyes, that she would pass her without seeing her. Further, it was remotely possible that, as they had made each other's acquaintance under conditions of another sort of dress, she might not know her again. Jane's hat had a broad brim which shaded her face.

But the Londoner looks at the passer-by, and women, instinctively, perhaps, look at women.

A few paces from Jane, Betty looked up. Jane saw recognition dawn in her eyes.

"Miss Weston," she said, and stopped.

"It's Mrs. Tremlet," Jane heard herself saying.

"No, it isn't," said Betty. "It's Betty. If you're my father-in-law's cousin, you're Geoffrey's, and if you're Geoffrey's cousin, you're his mother's, too."

"Then I'm not Miss Weston," Jane said, smiling. "I'm Jane."

Even as she spoke she marvelled rather ruefully at herself for her folly. She had wished not to see Betty, and here she was establishing relations with her on intimate terms — more, a relationship! Could anything be more foolish?

"That's better," Betty said. "There isn't time for approaches and stages. There isn't much time for anything, is there? And one knows at once. At least I do."

Perhaps Jane's unspoken 'How do you mean?' showed itself on her face.

"Whether one likes people," Betty said.

There was the briefest pause before Jane answered.

"Why, yes," she said, not very convincingly and quite unable to keep the somehow qualifying 'why' out of the words that were supposed to be expressing her agreement, "I think one always knows — at once."

Betty laughed.

"You're not quite sure."

"Yes, I am. Quite sure that one knows at once."

Betty, to Jane's dismay, appeared to consider this. Would she find in it what to Jane was only too patently there? She felt a beast; — more of a beast still when Betty, the smile dying out of her face, which Jane saw now to be tired and worn, said: "I see. You must forgive me. I forget sometimes that other people aren't as impulsive as myself."

"Oh," Jane said, "I didn't mean . . ." — but inwardly she knew that she had meant what Betty suspected.

And was it even true what she had said?

Did one — did *she* — always, indeed, know? Might she not genuinely have liked Betty at sight if she had heard nothing about her? If, moreover, she had not had to see in her a possible, perhaps a definite, rival?

There was again a moment's pause in which neither found anything to say. This dreadful passage that had yet the charm of hidden byways! The straitness of it, and somehow the straightness also, threw you as it were upon yourself. Whatever you said would beat against the walls and come back to you. Sinister things must have happened here — murders? — blackmailings? In it, frightened ears must have listened for the sound of footsteps. Frightened eyes must have raked the length of it despairingly for the sight of approaching help. 'Sister Ann, Sister Ann, is there anybody coming?' Or, conversely, prayers must have risen here from beating hearts that no one should come. But other things must have occurred here too; things lovely in themselves: the whisperings and the kisses of lovers, of young lovers; between these grim walls, but under the canopy, after all, of the sky and overarching branches of trees.

"No," Betty said suddenly, "I won't take what our grandmothers called a 'rebuff' from you. Whether you are disposed to like me or not — let me say this; please let me — I like

you. And at least I shall be on safe ground if I say I defy you not to have liked Geoffrey."

Ah, she could respond to that! This extraordinary woman! But with no reservations or subterfuges she could respond to that.

"He's adorable," she said warmly. "The dearest little boy. Adorable!"

"He is, isn't he? Though his mother says so. And he's lost his heart to you. Talks of his new cousin. Calls you Jane Westum."

"The darling!" Jane said. "'Jane Westum'?"

Betty nodded.

"Jane Westum."

"*I* called *him* Cupid."

"I know. I've heard all about everything. Cupid. About Mercury, too, who brings messages — His Grandfather's Voice there. But you cut up his cake for him. And sang to him. You sang 'A frog he would a-wooing go' and 'What shall we have for dinner, Mrs. Bond? There's beef in the larder and ducks on the pond.' If I were a jealous person — or could be — I think I should be jealous of you."

"Of me?" Jane said.

"'A f'og he would a-wooing go' — He sings it to himself all day. And another one something about an old man —"

"'Who said he could do more work in one day than his wife could do in three'?"

"That's it. 'Than his wife,' according to

Geoffrey, 'could do in f'ee.' The right sort of song. His mother, you see, sings him ragtime."

Old as the hills Jane's songs for children. Her mother's, like some of Ellen's; hers before her. The difference, perhaps, in a nutshell, between her and Betty; between Betty who stood for her generation and Betty's father-in-law who stood for his and couldn't, if he would, have understood her. She felt more kindly towards Betty. And that was dangerous!

She was being 'implicated,' she saw that well enough. But what could she do? What could she have done from the moment when she had committed herself to Christian names? From the moment, indeed, when Betty had stopped to speak to her. It was the fault of the passage. Lansdowne Passage, never thenceforward to be forgotten, had trapped her; let her down; let her in for — goodness knew what. Yet, as she found herself feeling more kindly towards Betty, she felt more kindly towards it also. It was not wholly sinister. It was not, perhaps, sinister at all. No, if but for its association with the gardens which flanked it, and which its walls concealed only to the outward eye, and for something of romantic suggestion which hung about the idea of it — a lane, tree-shaded, in the thick of the town —

it had, at any rate when you viewed it freshly and in a kindlier spirit, not only a sort of beauty, but even an air of benignity and peace. She no longer resented it.

It was no longer empty as it had been of any but themselves. An errand-boy with a basket on his arm had clattered down the steps at the eastern end of it, and was whistling his way towards Curzon Street. She had to stand back to let him pass. People were coming from the other direction also — a woman in rusty black and a child hugging a Teddy-Bear. They passed between her and Betty. A few minutes since and she would have welcomed them as an interruption. Now she was indifferent. Other people were appearing and yet others. So, though, if she wished to escape, they presented the excuse that in standing thus talking she and Betty were blocking the way, she did not avail herself of it, but passively awaited developments.

When they came, however, they found her unprepared.

Betty was asking her to come back with her to luncheon.

Her hesitation lost her. She had no valid reason for refusing, but that amounted to nothing. She had only to make, not even to invent, one. She was expected at home in Clarges Street; had directions to give Ellen

before she went out; letters to write; a dozen plausible reasons to choose from. Nor was it incumbent upon her to produce any reason at all. But she had hesitated.

"Do," Betty pleaded. "If you aren't doing anything particular. It will be accounted to you, one day, for righteousness — not, I'm sure, that *you'll* have any need of pleas when the Books are opened. If there are any Books. Why won't you? I'm in the depths to-day. It would be a charity."

This extraordinary woman! And sooner or later, if Betty persisted, she would have to go to her. If not that day, then another. Better get it over and trust to luck not to involve herself further.

So she said that she would be delighted to lunch with her, but that she must telephone to her landlady.

"Five minutes from here. Charles Street. You shall telephone the moment we get there. Thank you, Jane Weston."

"No," Jane said, retracing her steps and hoping for the best. "You."

They emerged from the passage into Curzon Street.

Betty's face had brightened, but, seen now in daylight, as against the softly shaded lights of the restaurant in which she had had her first sight of it, it showed faint lines which had

not then been visible. The eyes looked tired under the rather wan gentleness of their smile. The eyes of a child, starry, wondering, trustful, or at least not untrustful; but the eyes of a child who has sat up too late at a party. Something that was melancholy, pathetic even, was in their expression — in all that, indeed, which was Betty. She was pathetic as a child is pathetic, or a kitten, or any young animal. Steeled as Jane was, or rather as she wished to be, against the insinuatingness of her charm, she felt herself to be increasingly under the spell of it.

They passed through the bottle-neck of the end of Curzon Street into widening spaces, and Jane breathed more freely.

"Don't you hate London?" Betty said suddenly.

"No," Jane said.

"Oh, of course there isn't anywhere else, but I get so sick of it. The pavements and the people. The everlastingness. World without end. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. People, people. And the telephone bell, all day."

"Beginning in your bed, I suppose."

"Yes, I have one in my bedroom. How did you know?"

Jane smiled.

"I thought you would," she said. "I was only guessing."

"I believe you have a way of guessing right."

"I think sometimes that I have," Jane said.

They turned into Queen Street. As they were passing the chemist's shop, Betty remembered that she had a headache, and, with a "One moment, Jane Weston," went in to buy aspirin. That, too, Jane thought to herself with a smile, as she waited. But there was more to come. For, as if verily, 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,' not many yards had been covered before Betty found that she had forgotten her bag and had to go back for it. Oh, you wouldn't have to be told much about Betty!

They reached Charles Street.

The house into which Betty ushered her was one of the smaller houses at the western end of the street. On the whole, in later consideration of it, she was disposed to think that Betty's hand lay less heavily upon it than she would have expected. A rather severe simplicity characterised the hall into which the front door opened. There was a black-and-white tesselated pavement, and the walls, and the decorations generally, showed none of the extravagances for which she would have been prepared. There were, for example, but three pictures, and these a copy of a Guardi which hangs in the National Gallery and two Cana-

lettis. Only in Betty's individual quarters, her sitting-room, whence Jane telephoned to Ellen, and her bedroom with the black marble bathroom opening out of it, which Jane was duly shown in the course of her visit, did she find the Bakst or the Poiret influences which, beautiful in themselves, but 'wrong' in inappropriate conditions, she would have wagered would confront her there, and which it would at least not have surprised her to see in evidence everywhere else. So, on the whole, if only on the whole, she was to think ultimately that a staid Georgian house had got off lightly.

But where Betty had let herself go, she had 'spread' herself, as Jane might see at her leisure, for, having shown her the telephone and how to use it — a necessary precaution, since it was concealed in the body of a Chinese monster from behind whose back you unhooked the receiver and into whose ferocious mouth you spoke your message — she left her for a very considerable time to her own devices. Jane, looking about her — at the orange walls, the black ceiling and black carpet, the day-bed with its covering of black-and-gold brocade and its pile of gold-tasselled bolsters and cushions of every colour and shape — saw that the setting which she had conceived for her was the exact setting which Betty had

conceived for herself. Guessing right? Guessing right. The room was not so much an admission as an avowal; its presiding spirit transparent to her as glass.

"I am not happy here," she said to herself with Mélisande, and wondered how she was to get through what the next hour or so might hold for her. Well, there was always Geoffrey — as there was, so far at least, the calm austerity of the unspoilt hall. And, like the hall, other rooms might miraculously have escaped. She would see.

Betty's appearance, meanwhile, when at length she rejoined her, did not altogether reassure her. Sheherazade? Tamar? Cleopatra? or just a mannequin trailing loose draperies? Actually what she wore was no more than what the artist who had designed it for her would probably have called a rest-gown or a *robe*, perhaps, *d'intimité*, but Jane, who did not dress to her passing moods, and who, if she wanted to rest, rested in whatever she might happen to be wearing, saw in it one more of those evidences which against her inclination were thrusting themselves upon her. Also, in the interval in which she had been left to herself — in the atmosphere, moreover, of a room which was alien and unsympathetic to her — she had receded from Betty by unmeasurable distances. What had

they in common? On what conceivable point could they meet?

Yet, even as she asked herself the questions, she became conscious that Betty was not, so lightly or so summarily, to be dismissed. She was not to be dismissed at all. She had come into the room radiating charm. Glamour, a sort of magnetism, flowed from her like sunlight which blesses what it touches. The room itself looked right now that Betty was in it. Not immediately, however, did Jane surrender. Was the faintest check perceptible? Did Betty for one brief moment suspect that she had lost ground? Or was it that Jane, conscious that she was opposing her — as with a barrage of steel that might have deflected her rays, or, reflecting them, have thrown them back, spent and useless, upon herself — suspected a faltering which had no existence in fact? If, for that brief moment — "Have I left you too long? seemed a negligent hostess?" — her batteries did falter or miss fire, it was, indeed, but for a moment, and, in spite of herself, Jane succumbed to their activities. They melted her barrage; disarmed her. Five minutes had not passed before she was once more, and this time almost entirely, under her persuasive and persistent spell. With that voice and that engaging quality of face and form, let her have her abominably successful room and her

beautiful perverse trappings! A thing of beauty, she would be a joy for just as long as she was there to be heard and seen, and you, whoever you were, were there also to hear and to see her.

It was then that Jane herself was conscious of a check — a sudden pulling-up as of a horse upon its haunches. Somewhere, somewhen . . . This was not the first time she had come within the range of such batteries! She had a sudden mental vision of gulls flying and dipping, dappled sunlight, shadows blown about, as it were, by the breeze . . . the Pier at Brighton.

Yes. Yes. But the difference! The incalculable, the inestimable difference! In common with Betty it was true that the being whom she now thought of as 'Peter' had had this mysterious endowment, but with him it had been unconscious. Betty, equipped by nature in the same way, used her power deliberately; reckoned with it; relied upon it.

Betty was looking at her.

"I never saw anything so ingenious as your telephone," Jane said.

"Oh, that! My own invention. All out of my own head."

Luncheon was announced. Betty, a hand on her arm, was leading her to the dining-room.

If she had not already recovered herself, the room which she now saw would have made her recovery complete. You could have imagined no greater contrast to the room she had just left than was presented by the room they were entering. On the threshold and before even the thick mahogany door had been closed behind her — closed with a soundlessness that was to have its part in the healing quality of her impressions — a feeling of peace and calm and well-being fell upon her. Here she felt at once she could be happy. The quiet dignity of the mellow walls with their half-dozen pictures — Dutch or Flemish interiors, or bricked courtyards, with a pump, perhaps, or a trough or a tiled gutter — was the quiet domestic dignity of the pictures themselves. In a room not very unlike this, Jan Arnolfini and his wife had sat, or rather stood, in the supreme modesty of their conscious but innate respectability, to Van Eyck himself. A round convex mirror, the counterpart of that which has its fascinating place in that very picture, hung over the mantelpiece, as if to give colour to the thought. It reflected its surroundings in exquisite miniature; the long windows with their dark curtains — curving them, curving everything — the staid and solid sideboard with its two branching candlesticks; the staid solid furniture; the polished

table with its silver and its glass; Betty and herself (making even her a thing of delight!); the butler, silently moving, or bending over one or other of them with decanter or dish.

"Oh," she said, "I do like this room."

"Yes?" Betty looked round her. "Geoffrey liked it — little Geoffrey's father, I mean. You don't think it's a little conventional? The usual dining-room? Just exactly the dining-room you would expect from the fanlight over the hall-door?"

"The dining-room I should want to expect," Jane said with a smile, "from the fanlight, as you say, and the two side posts of the hall-door."

To herself she was saying, 'Hardly dare to expect. Hope against hope to be able to expect. Pray that I might be allowed to expect.'

"You see?" said Betty triumphantly. "Conventional. You're only confirming me. There's no surprise in it. No clash. No — what shall I say? — drama."

"I think that's why," Jane said.

Betty challenged her with whimsical eyes.

"Isn't drama just what you don't want in a dining-room? Drama doesn't go with digestion."

"That's true. How wise you are. Still . . ."

"Still what?"

Betty looked round her again.

"Yes, there's certainly something to be *said* for a dull dining-room. But the day before yesterday. The day before the day before yesterday! Need one? Oh, Jane Weston, need one? A room that is a sort of gentle — but very impertinent protest! After all, why should one? Why should one? I ask you."

"Put up with it, do you mean?"

Betty nodded. "No, if you put it like that, I don't see why one should," Jane said.

"Then why are you smiling?"

"I was thinking how you would hate my little house."

"But that's in the country where one wants to stand still. One can't here. I don't see a bit why I shouldn't like your house. I can imagine it in relation to you. Oak. A faint smell of beeswax."

"There is a smell of beeswax."

"Well, I adore beeswax. And I fit very well into the country, I may tell you."

"Betty, of course you do. I can see you in tweeds and homespuns as clearly as I see you in what you've got on." She did not say that it was in snapshots that she saw her so clearly in tweeds and homespuns. "In that sense I don't even fit into the country. I'm not a sportswoman. I don't ride — to speak of. I've never in my life been out with guns. Never hunted or fished. Never played golf.

There! If you ask me what I do with myself, I shan't be able to tell you. There's the garden, of course, where I work like a horse, but . . ." She paused, trying to remember what the point was and could only remember that she had seemed in some way to have been identifying herself with the room in its supposed criticism of its owner. She came rather lamely to a halt.

"Well, you can make your mind easy," Betty said. "This room has got to remain as it is for the present. The very considerable present. Rubber and rates and taxes have settled that it is not to be done up just yet."

'Thank you, Betty."

"We continue to thank each other. Have some more omelette."

"I will."

They were making friends. Worse and worse. You couldn't quarrel with Betty. You couldn't even want to quarrel with Betty. If you weren't careful, you would end by loving her. Could anything be more unfortunate?

But it was not till luncheon was over and they were back in Betty's sitting-room — and Jane, rather to her amusement, was beginning to like it! — that she was to realize the full menace of the mischance which had befallen her. Betty, coiled up amongst the

cushions of her day-bed, was the loveliest thing Jane had ever seen. Sheherazade again, Tamar, Cleopatra? What did it matter! Perfect of her kind from the crown of her dark head to the points of her slender feet. Jane's own feet, her single indisputable claim to beauty, were not more beautiful; and Betty had every other. These things, which in a sense were everything, were nothing. It was not these. Jane admitted them ungrudgingly, glad, under the spell of them, that Betty should have so much. It was not even that they emphasised her own disadvantage, inevitable though it was that she should have remembered the part which her feet had played in the incident which had made the upheaval in her life and which, indirectly, had led even to her very presence in Betty's tormenting room. It was not that. It was something which she felt to be impending and which, when it came, found her, as Betty's invitation in the tunnel of Lansdowne Passage had found her, completely and hopelessly unprepared.

Betty was going to confide in her. Betty, a law unto herself, careless of usages and appearances, indifferent to anything but the impulsions of the moment and of her own unaccountable moods, was confiding in her.

Betty, though she did not name him, was

going to talk to her, was talking to her, of Peter.

This extraordinary woman! This terrible, lovable woman!

CHAPTER XI

THE room had become Lansdowne Passage and more dreadful to Jane than Lansdowne Passage. Four walls imprisoned her instead of two. No passers-by to be looked for, no outside help. Geoffrey her one hope now, or perhaps an interruption from the telephone. But Geoffrey, up in his nursery, was to be rung for when his mother was ready for him, and no sound came from the monster whose capacious belly held the telephone and its bell. The grinning monster, evil but benevolent, seemed in league with the adverse, all too friendly influences which pressed upon her. Capable of speech, he just grinned and preserved his silence.

"Jane Weston," Betty had said, "you don't know what a perplexed, unhappy woman it was who met you this morning and craved and was granted the boon of your company. You don't know what you've done for me by just being there. *Why* you, whom I hardly know, I can't tell you. But somehow, you. Perhaps because I hardly know you. I was desperate."

Could Jane have done less than ask what

was the matter? Could she, without brutal callousness, have looked less than concerned?

"I don't know what to do — I'm miserable. I don't know what I want. At least I do know what I want, but I can't have it. Oh, it's my own fault, I know that — if anything is one's fault. No, it isn't my fault. I didn't make myself. I didn't ask to be born into this beastly world. I didn't ask, anyway, to be born with needs that — that you wouldn't understand. That I don't understand myself. I won't go into them and alienate you for ever. I've quite decent qualities, but there's a side of me, that is the real me, that I suppose would horrify you. I've always had it. From a child. In a way I'm not the least ashamed of it. It's the way I was made. There have always been women like me and there always will be. Why in the name of common sense can't facts be accepted? There have been times in the world's history when they have been accepted. Then people like me have had a perfectly open, honourable position in the scheme of things. It's the concealment that is ugly, not the fact. I suppose I'm shocking you. I can't expect not to."

"No," said Jane, "I don't know that you're shocking me. But why do you tell me? Must you tell me?"

"Yes," Betty said, "I must tell you. Who

am I to tell! One of my friends — any single one of a dozen charming women I know who would not even be surprised, who couldn't pretend to be surprised? Oh, don't make any mistake, good-humoured ladies don't bother themselves nowadays to wipe their mouths and say, 'Tush, God shall not see,' like the example in the Bible. Quite ordinary, pretty, charming people I'm talking of. Any use going to them? Or shall I seek out seven other spirits more wicked than myself?"

She changed her voice and spoke gently. When she pleaded, she broke you.

"Don't send me into the wilderness, Jane Weston."

"Oh," Jane said, "I don't want to send you into the wilderness or anywhere else. Who am I that I should? But" — she hesitated — "won't you regret, perhaps, that you've told me?"

"Not if you're the Jane Weston I think you. Let me have one nice, disapproving, respectable friend. I'm not really bad either. I'm not what *I* call wicked — not a bit! I haven't an ounce of cruelty or unkindness or even cattishness in me. I only take things as I find them — myself included. I don't ask anything. I've got to put up with my nature, that's all. If I'm allowed to live, I'm quite ready to let live without asking any questions.

What more ought any man reasonably to want? The plea for me when I'm dead will be, *quia multum amavit*, perhaps, but I'm not dead. It's because I'm alive, so damnably alive, that that will be the dubious plea for me. After all, Christ made it for a sinner whom *He* didn't condemn."

"I'm not condemning you," Jane said.

"I'm not really making it to you. I'm making it to someone who is putting me into my atrocious perplexity. Someone who wants to marry me."

"Well?" Jane said, after a long pause.

"Well?" Betty echoed. "Well? That's it."

"I don't think I understand."

"Yes, you do."

"I don't. You must know whether you want to marry him."

"I know whether I want to marry him. It's whether I may. Whether I dare, if you like."

"You must know, anyway, whether you love him."

"*Of course* I love him."

"Then . . ."

"Oh, you don't understand," Betty cried, impatiently. "You don't understand any more than he does."

"No," Jane said, hardly, "I'm afraid I don't."

"If it were a question of loving him, I'd marry him to-morrow. It isn't as simple as all that. Oh, Jane Weston, try to understand. Try. It's because I love him. I love him well enough to marry him . . ."

"Then for goodness sake, why not?" Jane said, almost angrily.

"Because I know myself. Because, though you mayn't think it, I'm rather honest, and my conscience — yes, I have one — isn't seared with a red-hot iron. I love him, I lie awake loving him. It is making me ill. I don't know that I've ever wanted anyone as I want him, but that doesn't mean — with me, Jane Weston — that I shan't love anybody else. There, I've said it, and if you're horrified, you can get up and go."

That was certainly what Jane, till that moment, had wanted to do. She felt the colour mount to her face, but not from shame. The sense of outrage was there, but it was not for herself or for her sex. There was a long pause in which neither spoke. Betty looked at Jane, Jane at Betty — a long, sustained gaze in which not an eyelid flickered.

Simultaneously they released each other's eyes.

"So you see," Betty said. She stretched out her hand, took another cigarette from a box which lay on a little table beside her, fitted

it slowly into the long holder which Abel Tremlet had spoken of. She stretched out her hand again and struck a match, but Jane had broken her silence and what she said caused the match to be allowed to burn itself out unused.

"But you've been married."

"Geoffrey. You think I didn't love Geoffrey?"

"I don't mean that. You took the risks then if what you're telling me about yourself is true — or can be true."

"Yes, and found they were risks. Found they were — more than risks. I loved Geoffrey right enough. My boy's father. Good God, Jane Weston, if I didn't love Geoffrey! I worshipped him. I was faithful to him and — I don't know — perhaps I should have gone on being faithful to him, but he went away."

At that Jane boiled over.

"He went to the War!"

It was a cry — in spite of herself a cry. The words and the tone were wrung from her, tears starting to her eyes, and her eyes blazing. The little bitter broken old man in the ugly Victorian drawing-room in South Eaton Place — hideous, if you like, but of sweet clean associations — and this beautiful lawless creature in her beautiful abominable lair; her alcove of a night club; her *cabinet par-*

ticulier! It was altogether too much; the contrast too cruel. But at the sound of her own voice she gave a little gasp of dismay, and that she might hide the accusing indignation that burned in her eyes, she shut them and lowered her head, till she should recover, at least, some working measure of control. In the darkness she had made for herself she heard the striking of another match. There was silence. When she looked up, Betty had lighted her cigarette and was blowing out the match very slowly. She put it carefully in the ash-tray.

"I'm sorry," Jane said; "I oughtn't to have said that."

But Betty showed no resentment.

"It was a perfectly natural thing to say. It was what I should have said myself if I had been you and if I didn't know what I do know — to my cost, Jane Weston — of human nature in war-time. Could one have supposed that one could want to dance — to take just one instance — when one's man was in the trenches? Could one have supposed that the men themselves could want to dance? But didn't they? Not Geoffrey, perhaps; he was older. The young ones, boys, back from that hell and going back to it. They were mad. And we were mad, too. Anything to forget and to help them to forget. And it wasn't the sort of dancing that you know, perhaps. A

danse macabre. We were dancing on corpses. German corpses — their own corpses, these boys. They were alive, and to-morrow they died or lost the limbs they had to dance with. Was it any wonder? Excitement, that was what they wanted, and what we wanted. Well, they got it, and we got it. But it did for some of us — the ones like me, anyway. Geoffrey was killed, but was spared knowing what he would have been bound to know sooner or later. One gave and one wanted to give — yes, and one wanted to get too. I don't defend myself. I just make a statement. Well, it's over and I've come through, but I am what I am and what it's made me, and someone I care for wants to marry me. There's my case in a nutshell."

"What exactly do you want of me?"

"I don't know. Not your advice, for you'll tell me that I can't marry him. You're bound to say that. No sensible person could say anything else. No, certainly not your advice. Your ear, I suppose — your kind ear just to pour all this into. You're probably a religious woman, and there's something in confession. You ought to be able to understand that."

"Good Lord!" Jane said. "Good Lord!"

"Are you very angry with me?"

"I don't know what I am," Jane said.

She felt, in truth, confused — as if she had

been buffeted about in a crowd which had hemmed her in, pressing upon her, pushing her, pulling her, stifling her, dragging her off her feet. She had emerged, if indeed she had emerged, torn, breathless, sore. She was spent. She could only sit still waiting for Betty to speak again — afraid that Betty, or even she herself, would speak.

Betty was speaking. Why couldn't she be quiet? She would not listen to her. A moment or two passed before the sense of what Betty had said got through to her.

"No," she said, answering her words, "you're quite right. I did not bargain for this."

"I hadn't a thought of inflicting it on you when I asked you."

Jane smiled. "Have you ever a thought of doing any of the things you do do, Betty?"

There was again silence. A clock which she had not observed before in the litter of beautiful things which the room held ticked loudly. It was as if it had then for the first time begun to tick.

"Well, anyway, I'm pretty unhappy," Betty said with a sigh. She flicked a long ash from the end of her cigarette.

"I dare say you are," Jane allowed herself to say.

Geoffrey in his grave; Geoffrey's father in

his lonely old age; little Geoffrey up in his nursery; Peter!

Peter. Good God, this woman!

"Does he know?" she asked suddenly.

"Who?"

"The man who wants to marry you."

"Oh, have I been talking all this time and haven't you understood yet? It's take him or leave him. You can see pretty well, I should think, that I don't hide things. He'd be marrying me with his eyes open all right, if that's what you mean. But one couldn't hide anything very easily from *his* eyes, and they'd be still open after he married me. That's the whole point, Jane Weston. They would be open, too, in a new and a very different way. Why, *he'd* kill me. He'd strangle me with his hands. I can feel him doing it. He has rather wonderful hands. They always make me think of that song everyone used to be singing . . ."

She broke off, looking at Jane curiously. But if Jane's face had shown anything of what she had been feeling, it was not enough to let Betty perceive the torture she was quite unwittingly inflicting, and this second check was as momentary as the first had been. So before Jane could stop her — though stop her? stop her? how? — tell her that if she spoke of Peter's hands, she, Jane, would scream or be

sick? — she was insisting, giving the line, singing it, even, in a small, very sweet voice:

"'I would have rather felt you round my thro-oat
Crushing out life than waving me . . .'"

But now Betty had seen. Jane, at this turn of the screw, this twisting of the knife in the wound, gave an exclamation of almost savage protest. She could well believe that the face Betty saw was distorted and livid.

"Stop it!" she cried. "Stop it!" as a schoolboy might have cried "Shut *up!*"

Betty stopped it at once.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "I didn't mean to upset you. Nobody is going to strangle me. I should escape. Somehow I always escape. I escape everything. I'm not the sort of person who does come to a bad end."

As if, Jane thought to herself, one would care if you did! But she could be thankful that Betty was so entirely astray, and she could play up to Betty's providential ignorance. She did so.

"There, I'm all right now," she said. "I was foolish. But, if you don't mind, we won't talk any more of stranglings. You — you visualised the thing for me. Perhaps I have nerves, too. Don't look so concerned. I'm all right. Now, if I'm to see Geoffrey . . ."

They went upstairs.

She took, at first, but the smallest interest in the fact that the drawing-room, when she saw it, should, like the dining-room, have got off scot-free. She had in it the sense only of having released herself from the room which had witnessed her ordeal. But, by degrees, she became conscious of the relief and the active pleasure which the room itself afforded her, and she could be glad on its account as on her own. Nothing jarred here. Nothing protested or even pleaded, and, curiously, its mistress did not look out of place in it. It was proof, maybe, in its gracious simplicity, against trumpery, and, ignoring it, could afford to accept it. By the time Geoffrey had appeared, Jane was comparatively at peace.

The remainder of her visit was plain sailing — a safe sailing on summer seas. Geoffrey, with his 'Jane Westums' and his engaging alternations of boisterousness and wondering adoration, was himself utterly adorable, unspoilt, untouched as the room. She played with him, sang to him, made him sing with her. Standing beside her at the piano, he rubbed his face against her shoulder like a puppy.

"Bless you," she said when she had done, and took him in her arms and kissed him and received his rapturous hug. Then they had tea. Then Betty and he took her round the rest of the house, and she saw Betty's bed-

room, blue and purple, with its bed of a queen or a cocotte; her black marble bathroom, with its looking-glasses from the ceiling to the floor, and its clusters of shaded and unshaded lights; but she saw Geoffrey's bedroom, too, which was white and plain as a hospital ward, and his nursery, which was everything that a nursery should be; and it was upon this happier note — the note of Geoffrey — that at last she got away.

In the street, drawing long breaths and walking fast, she felt, all the same, like some young adventurer, who has made his escape unfleeced — no, fleeced, plucked, stripped, but at least alive! — from a gambling-hell or a disorderly house.

Phew! . . .

Poor little Geoffrey.

Poor Geoffrey.

Peter!

Poor Peter, too? Poor Peter? Or was it, perhaps, when all was said that could be said, not Poor This one nor Poor That at all, but just Poor, horrible, lovable Betty?

Poor Betty.

One thing, however, was certain. She must get home to her hills.

CHAPTER XII

YES, she must go. She saw that clearly enough. Only half had been said and — or but — London had been made impossible for her. Betty would come to Clarges Street now if she held up the tip of her little finger. In common courtesy she must even ask her to come if she stayed, and she could not ask her, for, as she had not failed to perceive with a sort of reluctant exultation, by her confidences, Betty, all unwittingly, had played into her hands. As it was, then, she was sufficiently compromised. She had not invited confidences, had received them, indeed, under open protest; the damaging fact remained that she had heard them. But a little more and Betty might be in a position to say 'Mine own familiar friend.' She could already say, perhaps with some semblance of justification, 'In whom I trusted'! Her own familiar friend. God forbid!

No help for it. She must go.

But she was in a state of pitiable perplexity. She had no sooner decided that she would leave London than the thought of Peter, at the mercy of Betty's unforeseeable moods and her gentle devilish attraction, presented itself

to her afresh, to unsettle and unnerve her. Betty's perplexity, which she had spoken of as atrocious, was as nothing compared with hers. On the one hand, she had to abandon Peter to unspeakable risks, at the moment when her search for him was practically ended; on the other, to implicate herself further with Betty — through whom, moreover, in a sense she might be said to have found him! The situation was damnable, and, in every conceivable way, it was complicated by Betty's exasperating friendliness. But it was Peter's happiness that was at stake now, not Betty's nor her own. Her own, God help her, did not matter. Betty's, God help her, too, did not matter either. But Peter's! To anyone but Betty she could, she thought, have surrendered him cheerfully — if (oh, she could laugh!) you could even talk of surrendering that which you neither possessed, nor had, perhaps, the remotest chance of ever possessing? But you could at least surrender the hope of possessing, and she could, she honestly believed, have surrendered that.

Yet go she must.

Very well, she would go, but she would give herself a few days' grace. She was committed to Henley. She would stay for Henley. So to Henley, albeit as to one last chance — the chance of what? — she set her face. Then,

that she might not change her mind, she rang for Ellen and told her her plans.

"Next *week*, 'm?"

"Monday," Jane said.

"Monday, 'm?" Ellen repeated. "Next Monday?"

"Monday!"

What now?

"Yes. We've had our little jaunt and we've both enjoyed it. But everything has to come to an end, hasn't it?"

"Yes, everything has to come to an end," Ellen said doubtfully.

"And some things come to an end rather suddenly, you think?"

Did she say that lest Ellen should say it? Why should Ellen not say it? She *was* being sudden. Suddenness was forced upon her.

"I'm growing homesick," she said. "I've been growing homesick for some time."

"Monday, then, 'm. That's five days, after all. Plenty of time to see to my packing."

"Yes, Ellen, Monday. I must tell Mrs. Anson. Will you ask her to come up to me?"

"Yes, 'm."

But Ellen lingered.

"Yes, Ellen, what is it?"

"Nothing, 'm."

But there was something.

"Ellen, you naughty girl, what have you been up to?"

"I've got to make up me mind, 'm. I should have had to, I suppose, sooner or later, anyway. It's sooner, that's all. I haven't, rightly speaking, been *up* to anything, but, you know what it is, 'm; a girl has to know what she wants and — and it doesn't seem to be the same with men, 'm. They do seem to know what they want, don't they, 'm?"

Jane smiled.

"Where you're concerned, Ellen, it certainly seems as if they did."

"*I* can't help it, 'm," Ellen said.

"No," Jane conceded, "it doesn't appear to be your fault. But who is it now?"

It was a nephew of the landlady's, and he wanted to marry her.

"And he's different, 'm. That's where it is. I can't put *him* off with a 'Wait and See' or a 'Think it Over,' like the others. It's Yes or No. Take him or Leave him. Very masterful, 'm. Wouldn't stand any nonsense, 'm, *he* wouldn't. Not," she added after a minute's pause, "that I should want him to."

"What is it exactly that you do want, Ellen?"

"Oh, if it's what I really want, 'm . . ."

"Yes, Ellen."

"Him and my freedom."

Betty!

"You'll have to choose," Jane said, after a long pause which did not seem a pause, to her, at all, so filled was it with thoughts.

"By Monday, 'm — by Sunday, indeed, when he's coming to tea. I knew, of course, that I should have to make up my mind before we went home, because there's — well, there's one or two there who might think themselves concerned."

"Three, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't count Evan Jones. He's old enough to be my father. A widower, too. Though, of course, he's got the forge, and the house is very comfortable. But men who'll wait, 'm — you don't think so much of them, somehow, as of someone who won't."

But, bless the girl, it was she who had made them wait, all three of them, wasn't it?

Ellen laughed and blushed.

"They shouldn't have let me, 'm. I haven't patience with them."

Then it was this new one.

"It will mean incidentally that you'll be leaving me?"

"Not yet, 'm. We shouldn't be married till he's got a home for me, which wouldn't be for a year or so. He's a chauffeur, and earning good money, but he'd have to save. It's just this Yes or No by Sunday that's troubling me,

and these new leaves I shall have to turn over. No joke for me, 'm, I can tell you. Mustn't so much as look at anybody else if it's yes. To be sure, he won't be there to see, but there it will be. Minding my P's and Q's all the time, from that day forward, and I'm one who likes my bit of fun. No real harm in me if you understand, 'm. Nothing I should ever be ashamed of. But my precious liberty, 'm! Takes a bit of considering, doesn't it?"

Betty. But so different a Betty.

"What does Mrs. Anson say?"

"What would she say, 'm? He's her nephew."

"Well?"

"Thinks the world of him."

"And you yourself?"

"I do, too. I ought, of course, to think myself very lucky."

"Then it's worth the surrender of your liberty. What would you say if he wanted his?"

"Oh, I can trust him, 'm. It's me."

Betty! Betty!

"Take him," Jane said, "and think yourself lucky."

That evening after dinner she went round to South Eaton Place. She had given her landlady notice, but she must commit herself further.

If she could persuade Abel Tremlet to come with her on Monday, there would be no turning-back from her purpose. Also she was conscious of a desperate need of someone who cared for her, and that a still more desperate need was waiting for her at Aberllwyn. Sanctuary though her home was to her, shelter, haven, refuge, she felt that she could not face it alone.

Mr. Tremlet was at home. She was shown by a welcoming Johnson into the study.

"Jane, my dear. This is delightful."

The evening was cold and a fire was burning cheerfully in the grate.

"Why didn't you come and dine? Coffee. You've had your coffee? Too bad of you."

"But I'll have a cigarette."

"Tea, then. But yes, I say. We'll have some tea in about half an hour, Johnson."

"Very good, sir."

"And some of Mrs. Johnson's cake."

"Yes, sir. There's a fresh one."

Johnson withdrew.

"And that reminds me. I've never sent you that cake I promised you. She shall bake one to-morrow for you. My dear, I'm so glad to see you."

He drew her to the fire and pulled round a chair for her. He took a cigarette from the box, put it, smiling whimsically, between her

lips, struck and held a match for her. She allowed him to wait upon her, seeing the pleasure it gave him. And it was good to be waited upon. And it was good to be here. This ugly comfortable little room. How she loved it and him. She felt at peace with the world and her own soul.

"Cousin Abel, I'm going home on Monday."

"Monday!"

They all said that. As if it was something about the day.

"Yes, Monday. This isn't as sudden as it seems. My little home is calling me, and my garden and my hills. They've been calling me really for some time and I wouldn't listen, but — they've persisted and I've heard them at last and I've got to obey. So I've given my landlady notice and decided upon Monday. And — this is what I'm here for — you're coming with me."

"Gracious me!"

"Dear Cousin Abel, you're coming with me."

"You take my breath away."

"No, I don't. I warned you."

"We'll talk it over."

They were still talking it over when Johnson reappeared with the tea-tray. The old man had given no answer. He gave it thus:

"Johnson," he said, "Miss Weston and I are eloping on Monday."

"Indeed, sir?"

"You will pack what I shall want for a week."

"You will please pack what Mr. Tremlet will want for a month."

"Very good, 'm."

"That's settled," Jane said. "I shall send him back to you with roses in his cheeks."

"Perhaps," Johnson ventured, "you will bring Mr. Tremlet back to us."

"By Gad, he's right. Bravo, Johnson. That's a bargain, Jane Weston. You shall bring me back. You shall stay with me for the autumn."

"We'll talk that over at Aberllwyn," Jane said.

But Johnson, all unconsciously, had been instrumental in lifting a weight from her spirits. By his privileged and wholly innocent pleasantry he had brought about that which enabled her already to face the immediate future with a light heart. The prospect of returning in a few weeks changed everything for her, and the thought of departure no longer dismayed her. Betty would probably be away by the time she came back, and, in any case, at — and from — Abel Tremlet's house she would not be likely to see very much of her.

The fact that she would be staying under the paternal roof-in-law would protect her automatically from that intimacy the establishment of which she wished so earnestly to avoid, and to which, in her own rooms in Clarges Street, or elsewhere, her relations with Betty must inevitably have exposed her.

Johnson, had, of course, only precipitated what his master would presently have thought of and urged on his own account, but, for Jane, nothing could have happened more patly, and she blessed his indiscretion and the happy understanding between master and man which had made it possible.

"Thank you, Johnson," she said, laughing.

"Thank you, 'm," Johnson said with a bow, and looked at his master. "You see, 'm, after thirty years one gets to know, does one not, 'm, what is good for Mr. Tremlet."

She was happy again now, and began with excitement to discuss plans for her cousin's visit.

"Monday morning at Paddington. Ten something. I'll let you know the exact time and we'll motor up from Welshpool. I'll order a car. If only it is fine! Through such country, Cousin Abel! You'll like my hills. Oh, you'll like my hills."

Abel Tremlet watched her glowing face and

her shining eyes. It was then that he had an inspiration.

"Where do you say you'll hire the car?"

"Welshpool. The Cambrian Garage. We could go on to Newtown, of course, and hire there, but one sometimes has to change and there's always rather a long wait. Besides, I should like you to see as much as possible of the country. We'll motor from Welshpool."

"Does the car go back the same night?"

"I should think so, but, anyway, I could put it up in my empty stables."

She had told him all he wanted to know.

"Bring some strong boots. Can you climb, Cousin Abel?"

"Slowly. If you give me time and adjust your young stride to my old falterings."

"I shall take you up to the Druid's Seat above Cwm."

"Bent on killing me, I see."

"Ah, you'll think the toil worth while. You shall rest in the great stone chair. I'll wear mistletoe in my hair. I'll give you back your youth."

"If anyone could, it would be you!"

"Our hills would do that for you. There'll be only my hills and me. You're prepared for that, aren't you? No 'society.' The parson — half the service in Welsh, by the way — and the doctor and Miss Rod of the Bank. I'll

take you to tea with Miss Rod of the Bank. A good tea you'll get, and the gossip of the neighbourhood."

She thought of Miss Rod, who, indirectly, had helped to send her to London, and blessed her. She thought of Betty, who, very directly, indeed, was sending her out of London — for a time, only for a time! — and, looking forward now to Monday, could almost have blessed her also.

Presently, off her guard and lulled by the apparent security of her rising spirits, she was talking of Betty, telling him of her visit to Charles Street.

"I can't help liking her," she said.

"Yes, my dear! I'm not surprised. Many people can't help liking Betty."

She thought of Geoffrey and felt her heart harden again in sympathy with Geoffrey's father. And at once, as if taking advantage of that momentary hardening of her heart, and as if also to show how precarious in reality her recaptured happiness was, there thrust itself upon her a thought of another who could not, perhaps, help liking Betty. She must not think of him. Oh, if she was to have sleep that night, if she was to go to her beloved hills and not hate them, she must not think of him or of Betty. She thrust the thought from her. There was always little Geoffrey for

safety. She spoke of little Geoffrey. And then, by way of him — in a wish that she could take him too with her to her mountain fastness — got back to her hills.

"How he would adore them. We'd perch him on the Druid's Seat. I can hear him shout. There's always a wind up there, however still the day is. I think myself there are voices if one could hear them. Mystic voices, chantings, invocations. He would hear them, perhaps. But there would be his voice and the wind would carry it to Fiona Macleod's Country of the Young, where he belongs."

"You probably could have him, if you wanted him."

"How do you mean?"

"Betty will be away on her round of visits. She packs him off to the seaside with his nurses."

It was tempting. Geoffrey with her and his grandfather. Geoffrey in the little old house. Geoffrey amongst the flowers in her garden. Geoffrey, scampering, gurgling, shouting. It was tempting. But Betty. The forging of more and more links in a chain that must not have a single link added to it.

She shook her head. There were things that could not be.

"No," she said. "It wouldn't do! I couldn't take the responsibility of him. He might hurt

himself or be ill. We'll go alone, Cousin Abel."

Presently, over the teacups, and to divert her mind still further from dangerous topics, she was telling him about Ellen.

"A chauffeur, you say?"

"A chauffeur. I'm glad he's a chauffeur. There's something romantic about a chauffeur. I think it's the uniform. Something about the peaked cap and the leggings."

"Something about the legs in the leggings."

"Well, something about the legs in the leggings, if you like. Though I should be sorry to encourage that thought with my too susceptible Ellen. Something about leather, let us say. Something about mechanics, too. One feels the same thing about sailors."

"You're an incurable romantic yourself, Jane Weston."

"Am I? My mother in me, I suppose. But I'm only being romantic for Ellen, whom I'm fond of and who deserves the best she can get. I want her to be happy."

It was then that Mr. Tremlet had a new inspiration. It entailed a question or two like the first.

"This chauffeur of hers. He's in private service?"

"No. He works for a company somewhere in Hampstead."

"A motor company. Selling or hiring?"

"Both, I imagine. They have a large garage, my landlady tells me, and what she called a very large 'clianteel.' The largest, she said, in the northwestern district. He's one of their best drivers. Why do you ask?"

"You approve of this engagement?"

"*She* does. So I do. I've confidence in her judgment, though, naturally, she's prejudiced as the young man is her nephew. Yes, I'm inclined to approve very much. Ellen needs a firm steady hand. I want to see her settled. But why, Cousin Abel?"

"I'll tell you, but it will involve a confession. Now listen to me. We're going to have a car for a month."

"What?"

He nodded.

"I was going to write — over your head, my dear — to that garage of yours at Welshpool, and say that I wanted that car you were ordering for the single journey for a probable four weeks. A liberty, I know. But you'll let me have this little pleasure, won't you? We'll see your Wales. We'll explore, go for joy-rides — nice vulgar joy-rides."

"Cousin Abel! Of course, I'll let you. It's angelic of you. Why, we could go everywhere! It's a great idea. I shall be able to show you not only what I've seen myself and want you

to see, but you'll show me what I haven't and what I've always wanted to see. We'll go for ours. And oh — I see; how splendid! We're" — she clapped her hands like a child — "we're to motor down. We're to have Ellen's young man to drive us!"

That, Mr. Tremlet told her, was his audacious idea.

"Do you think it can be arranged?"

"It must be arranged. I'll speak to Ellen to-night."

"She'd better communicate with her young man and tell him to come round and see me. It will mean starting by cock-crow, by the way."

"She shall ring him up in the morning."

And then, as once before, giving herself away (to herself utterly, though perhaps not to him? — perhaps, could she hope it, not to him?) she burst into tears.

"Jane," he said, "my precious Jane. My dear. My dear."

"You're so much too good to me."

He let her cry, his old arms round her.

"There," he said, from time to time, "there, there," soothingly, healingly, as you speak to a child.

She dried her eyes.

"Has Betty done anything?"

"No," she said, fervently. "No. What makes you think . . ."

For answer he just looked at her.

Oh, to be able to tell him — to be able to tell, as Betty, without the flicker of an eyelash, would have been able to tell (him or anybody else), more intimate secrets than hers! But she was not built like Betty.

"No, Betty hasn't done anything. All the same, though *she* doesn't know it — oh, you're wickedly clever, Cousin Abel, fiendishly, diabolically clever! — in a way she is concerned. Perhaps at Aberllwyn I shall be able to tell you, perhaps in the Druid's Seat, when you're looking miles and miles away at the hills and the woods and not at me, I may be able. I don't know. I must wait till I get there. For the moment I'm supposed to be homesick. You must believe that, as Ellen does — homesick and extremely foolish."

"Foolish! You were never that in your life."

"Yes, once I was very foolish. Something was offered to me and I didn't take it."

He did not say, 'And now Betty's got it.'

"And if I ever do tell you," Jane said, "you'll laugh. You'll see how ridiculously little I have to tell. 'How she harped!' you'll say — 'How she harped upon her telling or her not telling, and all the time, poor dear, she had nothing to tell.' But perhaps — I don't know — perhaps you'll see that that's just *it*."

"I dare say I shall see," he said.

"I'm half-afraid you will. Now I'm going. I've had the happiest evening with you and I'm counting the hours till Monday!"

She went.

So the strange day ended. She had dreaded the night, but, eased and refreshed, and with eyes fixed upon Monday and deliberately overlooking Saturday, which stood for Henley and what Henley might stand for, she slept like a top.

She spoke to Ellen in the morning.

CHAPTER XIII

UMBRELLAS. Mackintoshes. Burberrys. Not wholly for precaution either. The umbrellas were to go up, every now and then, but to come down at the slightest excuse. Things are as you take them. Mrs. Altringham's party, assembling at Paddington where a compartment in the train had been reserved for it, had come out determined to enjoy itself, and did.

Mrs. Altringham said, "Who cares for the weather? I've got my cloak and my on-too-car. I'm prepared to sacrifice my hat if need be, and I hope, girls, you've all got two of everything on underneath as I have."

Jane had not thought of putting on two of anything, but her white knitted jumper was warm or cool according to the needs of the moment — that was the best of knitted silk! — and, in addition to the blanket-coat over her arm, she had a long woolly scarf that would have defied the temperature of an Oxford towing-path in February. She was not afraid of being cold. So, suitably equipped, she looked, and felt, cool when the sun came out, warm when it went in. Henley weather that year could not be said to have behaved itself too well, and a considerable part of the

day, as of one, at least, of the preceding two, was spent in the putting-on and the taking-off of wraps. Was anyone downhearted? *NO!*

Mrs. Altringham's party — not entirely excluding herself, not by any means excluding Jane, who looked about twenty that day — well, say twenty-five! — was young. Spirits ran high in the train.

Jane, then, surrendering herself to conditions generally, took her part in the irresponsible chatter. All was well. All would continue to be well, if the sight of one person in the world was not sprung upon her. There was almost every chance that all would be well. The only tremor she had felt as yet was upon the platform at Paddington. Once the railway carriage had received her, and she had contrived to establish herself at the far end of it, she was safe. She had kept her eyes from the windows on the dangerous side, and only let them stray in that direction when some passenger, ignoring the notice which proclaimed the compartment 'Reserved,' opened the door to look for a seat.

She wanted now to get through the day without disturbance to her peace of mind.

"Going away!" Mrs. Altringham said. "Not waiting for the matches!"

Jane explained that she had a guest coming to her at Aberllwyn.

"Do you hear that, Amy? Jane's going away on Monday."

"On Monday!"

They all said that — as if there was something particular about Monday.

"The day after to-morrow," Jane said.

"Oh, too bad of you. And we wanted you to come to the Eton and Harrow dance. Can't you wait for that? Make her wait for that, Mother. Persuade her, Gerry. Persuade her, Mr. Lennox."

"You can't go!" they all cried. "She simply can't. You can't, you know, Jane" — and Mr. Lennox, whom she had met half an hour ago for the first time, said, "Just as I was going to ask if I might call you 'Janey.'"

"You may call me 'Janey,'" Jane said, "and I'll be a sister to you if you like, but I've got to go."

Somebody started 'We — Want — Jane — Weston!' A battle-cry. They took it up, even Mrs. Altringham, rocking with laughter and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. Even the girl in the corner whom Jane did not know.

'We — Want — Jane — Weston!'

There was an uproar and a cry of "Speech!"

"Speech! Speech!"

That sort of thing. That sort of party. That sort of mood. The holiday spirit. But how good it was! She would get through her day,

and for that she was grateful. But how wonderful it was when she looked back! The quite happy but colourless years at Aberllwyn. Miss Rod of the Bank. Miss Lewis, who 'poured' for Miss Rod at her tea-parties. Mrs. Vaughan Rees, who 'likes hers very weak.' Mr. Roberts and his 'ponce-nay.' Mr. Morgan. The Barmouths — that Royal Family, friendly but so far off. Her own Mrs. Will-yams. Her Old-Man Effance. These for the boundaries of her world, and now, in the briefest space of time, this! What a miracle had been worked! What the few short weeks of London had done for her!

She shook her head, laughing.

"Speech?" she said. "I'm speechless. It's dear of you all. I'm going on Monday, but I'm coming back in the autumn. I'll give you your answer then, Mr. Lennox."

"Janey!" Mr. Lennox said, reproachfully.

"Johnny, then. You will wait till the autumn — Johnny?"

"Till the end of time, Janey."

Absurdities of that sort. Of every sort. The journey was beguiled with absurdities. Slough, meanwhile. A glimpse of Windsor Castle. Maidenhead. The river and the bridge; houses, crimson ramblers trailed over pergolas, Dorothy Perkinses. You were 'there' as Mrs. Altringham declared — and scram-

bling on to another dangerous platform — before you could say Jack Robinson. What you prayed then was, what you were to keep praying all day, that you would not, at the sudden glimpse of a face have to say Peter Robinson! You could jest to yourself, it will be seen, such was the infectious lightness of the general atmosphere, even about that which you held sacred.

Mrs. Altringham rounded up her flock. Mr. Lennox and the girl Jane did not know attached themselves to Jane.

"Your coat, Janey."

"No, I'll carry it myself, thank you. A very independent nature, Johnny."

"She won't even let me carry her coat."

The bantering argument which ensued got them out of the station. Outside she felt safer, though she knew that she was not safe.

To wish not to see; how strange that was! But she had, at all costs, to preserve her peace of mind. She hardly dared to look about her. So many men in flannels, any one of whom . . .

She pulled herself together; plucked up courage; looked about her.

There. You see? Nobody the least like him. Her spirits rose again; found their former level. Grasp your nettle. That never failed you. Why, the crowd itself helped. The town *en fête* in spite of lowering skies.

Fair-day. The holiday mood. The procession from the station to the boats and the lawns streamed out into the road, where hawkers were selling their wares and shouting them in hoarse thrusting voices — race-cards, balloons, cheap chintz-covered cushions. Touts importuned you. You saw gipsies.

One hawker, more enterprising than the rest, was selling umbrellas.

"Be wise. Defy the ellerments. Safety for two 'alf-crowns. Buy a umbereller."

The girl she did not know, whose name she gathered was Dorothy Something — misled probably, Jane thought with some amusement, by the semblance of importance which had been given to her in the train — continued to attach herself to her. She hung on Jane's words and agreed with her. She said, "Yes, *isn't* it!" when Jane spoke, or, "*Doesn't* one!" as the case might be, or gave vent to fervent "*I know's.*"

"It must be wonderful to be you," she said, gaspingly, as they reached the landing-stage, at which the two punts which Mrs. Altringham had chartered were waiting, and where another man and another girl were to join the party.

"To be me?" Jane said.

"To have everybody wanting you as naturally they must. To know that wherever you

go — you will let me sit next you, won't you? If you can you will, won't you, but I don't suppose I've a chance."

Jane looked at her with a puzzled smile, and met not cattishness, but the young humble adoration of a puppy.

"Of course you shall sit next me if you want to," she laughed. "There won't, you'll find, be any competition."

But there was.

Mrs. Altringham, already embarked, with the crew of her own punt, and establishing herself comfortably in her nest of cushions, said, "Settle it amongst yourselves."

Jane caught a beseeching look from Dorothy. She gave her a cue.

"Well, I can't paddle," she said, "so that disposes of me."

"And I can't either," Dorothy said, breathlessly, before Mr. Lennox could get out his "Janey, I'll teach you."

That settled it. Amy Altringham and Mr. Lennox took their places in the stern, the other man in the bows. Dorothy gave Jane's hand a grateful squeeze.

So they pushed off and the day began in earnest.

"If we get separated," Mrs. Altringham cried, "half-past one, remember, at Phyllis Court, for luncheon."

"Right-oh, Mrs. Altringham," sang Lennox.

The girl called Dorothy was purring with pleasure.

"Everything I want," she said.

Jane smiled again. It was very ridiculous, but somehow very gratifying, though you knew this young worship was based on a preposterous misconception. She was just Jane Weston, not a sort of centre round which the party revolved. Something, surely, besides the accident of the chorus, which had lent her a fleeting prominence in the train, must have focussed the child's ingenuous attention upon her.

"It was splendid of you. You can, of course, really."

"Can what?"

"Manage a punt."

"*You* were bluffing?"

The absurd child had hoped, and believed, that she, Jane, was!

Jane shook her head.

"Not in this crowd, anyway," she said. Her impulse was to tell her, once for all, how entirely astray she was in her estimate of her, Jane's, qualifications for the pedestal upon which she had placed her. More and more she was perceiving that she was supposed to be in some inner ring, some limelighted circle, from the outer fringe of which she was being re-

garded with humble envy and admiration. Why, in the name of all that was extraordinary? But she was sensitive enough to young sensitiveness to perceive also that to enlighten her would be brutal. She held her peace, therefore, and continued to wonder. Sooner or later she herself would be enlightened and she could wait. The problem, meanwhile, like the bustle and traffic of the roadway, helped to divert her. She forgot her anxieties and looked about her as before.

The pageant of the river, new to her, enthralled her: skiffs, punts, dingeys, canoes, launches — here and there a boat decorated, over-decorated, perhaps, with flowers. A gondola. A real Venetian gondolier. What fun it all was. And, behind everything, scattered music: the tinkle of a distant floating piano, the thrumming of banjos and guitars and mandolins, the jingle of tambourines, the clashing of bones. Every now and then a bell would sound and the course would be cleared for a race. Then you would find yourself jammed in a solid mass of boats so close together that you could have walked from one to another for a hundred yards, and you would strain your eyes down the course for a glimpse of two specks slowly growing larger, and, though you knew less than nothing of the racing, you would be caught up in the general excitement.

'Leander!' 'Well rowed, Leander!' 'Leander!' — or Eton, or Oxford, as the case might be — and you won half-a-crown from Johnny Lennox, and lost it presently to Amy Altringham, and had not a care in the world.

Jane saw faces she knew in the crowd — (not very important faces, Dorothy!) — and faces she knew by sight. It pleased her when someone she knew bowed or waved or called to her, and it pleased her when she saw in the flesh persons whose faces were common property. But then everything pleased her.

It was generally Dorothy who pointed people out. Dorothy, Jane could see, made it her business to know.

"There's So-and-So, or So-and-So," she said, and Jane, interested, sometimes, said "Where?" or "Show me?" — and then, "So that's So-and-So!" or, "Is that So-and-So?"

"She's prettier off than on, don't you think?" — and Jane sometimes thought she was — whoever she was — and sometimes thought she, or he, wasn't. For some of Dorothy's masculine celebrities were pretty, too.

"Why, you know who everybody is," Jane said.

Dorothy sighed.

"You see I collect postcards."

Poor Dorothy who wanted to be in the swim! It was somehow a revelation to Jane.

So there were really people who took perhaps even the illustrated papers seriously, who thrilled to the 'names leading from left to right' under a group to 'Miss Twilight Sleep, the famous Revue Artist, in her Bungalow at Bray,' or, 'The Beautiful Mrs. What's-her-name Back from Canteen Work in Belgium.'

"I want to know people," Dorothy said, "not only know them by sight. It must be so wonderful to be really *in* it."

"In what?" Jane asked, forgetting.

"In everything. If one is, one does, as a matter of course. First Nights, for instance. To know everyone in front and then to go behind because one knows the artists too. I wanted to know you dreadfully."

"Me! But *I* don't . . ."

She broke off. She was wholly at sea. She was sailing under falser colours, it was plain, than she had supposed. Who on earth was she supposed to be? She was not forgetting now, but she must know. The mystery must be cleared up.

"Did you know me by sight? Had you seen me before?"

"Of course I had. Of course I knew you by sight."

"Are you sure you mean me?"

"You? Of course I'm sure."

Jane may have looked her surprise.

"In the Park every day with that dear old man who's so devoted to you. And at the Savoy dining with him. I was with such a stuffy party — aunts and things. I hardly go anywhere, you see. Mother's so old-fashioned. She doesn't even know I smoke. It's humiliating. And our table — I can't think how we got it — was next the Plantagenistas'. I think she's so wonderful, don't you, with her black hair and her dead-white face and her red lips (I mayn't even use lip-salve!); and Mrs. Tremlet, who's the loveliest of them all, *I* think, went across to speak to you."

Betty!

So that was it. Betty. She was shining under the radiance of Betty. Her own one little visit to the haunts, say, of fashion, and because Betty, who, it seemed, was more of the movement and of the moment than she in her ignorance had supposed, had spoken to her, she had emerged wearing a borrowed light! She could have laughed aloud. It was comic — piteous also.

"You poor little thing!" she thought, but whether she meant Dorothy, or herself, or Dorothy more than herself, she hardly knew.

But Betty. That 'this' should come to her through her.

"Do you admire her so much?" she heard herself asking.

"Why, she's it itself. Don't you? You who know her so well."

"I don't know her very well," Jane said, after a moment's consideration.

"But I saw you with her this week — yesterday, was it, or the day before? In Queen Street, near the chemist's. You were going towards Charles Street. You were probably lunching with her, I thought. You don't know how I envied you — and her."

"Yes, I was lunching with her. Where were you?"

"On the other side of the road — where I always am. We live just round the corner, in Barn Street, but we might just as well live in Bayswater. Is the house as wonderful inside as the papers say? But it must be. There's a sort of Russian Ballet Room, isn't there? How I should love to see it!"

"Oh, yes. There's a Russian Ballet Room. At least it might be called that. It probably would be."

"I can imagine her in it. I do think she's so lovely! And there's someone that everyone wants, if you like!" (Ingenuous Dorothy!) "The bell going all day long. Always someone waiting for her in a motor. And doesn't she keep them waiting! But she may. I shall never forget the first portrait I saw of her. In the 'Rambler' — while I was still at school."

"Widowed by the War?" Jane hazarded, calculating dates.

"You remember it?" Dorothy said ecstatically.

But Jane did not remember it. She was only putting two and two together . . . and estimating vulgarities. She felt rather ashamed of herself for her own disingenuousness. It was also the first really 'catty' thing she had said, and Betty, whatever she was, was never 'catty.'

"Yes," she said, "she's very lovely."

But suddenly she became conscious that something had happened, and that something was impending. Another link! Another imminent revelation? The faintly perceptible stirring of the invisible hand that all along had so strangely seemed to be guiding her. Fate in seeming chances? Things, less than nothing in themselves, conspiring to lead her. Why had she gone to the Savoy that particular night? Why had she met her old cousin? Why, if you came to that, had Mr. Morgan been raised up to set her thinking? Goodness! You could not go back too far . . . or far enough. Twelve years. Why had she and her mother gone to Brighton? Why — but that was far enough. Dorothy Whatever-her-name-was, and howsoever insignificant she was in her own eyes, had, in a moment, in the

twinkling of an eye, assumed an importance for her that had to be reckoned with. Not for nothing these knowings-by-sight, this consuming interest in a life from which, for the time being, with her panting aspirations — a puppy straining at the leash while luckier puppies played — she felt herself to be excluded! For Dorothy, of her young knowingnesses, must know what she did not know. People in motors waiting! Peter in one of these. Peter in the motor that waited most frequently . . .

But it was here that a check came. The voice of Johnny Lennox protesting.

"Dorothy, you lazy little pig, come and do some work. You've monopolised Janey quite long enough. Come along. Change places with Amy."

Amy Altringham wasn't tired and wanted to stop where she was.

"You see!" said Dorothy, triumphantly.

"Then change places with me. Come along. You hear what I say. No back-chat, if you please."

"I shall sink you," Dorothy said, but she had to go, and it was not till they all disembarked for luncheon that she found herself beside Jane once more — or rather, so completely had their positions been reversed, that Jane found Dorothy once more beside her.

That, however, was not a moment for the resumption of the talk which had been interrupted, and at the luncheon-table they were separated. Jane could wait. In the crowd on the lawn, moreover, some of her nervous apprehension had returned. She was afraid again of seeing a face amongst the faces.

Mayonnaise. Cold chicken. Cherry tart. Champagne in slender tumblers. Raspberries for strawberries — first indication that the summer was passing.

She wanted now to sit beside Dorothy, but, in the re-embarking, she was hailed to the other punt. And so to the second half — no, to the second third, for they were to stay for the fireworks — of the day. She watched races. She listened to songs. 'If you were the only girl in the world and I was the only boy.' 'Avalon. Avalon — I left my heart in Avalon.' 'Mississippi.' 'Mrs. Something-else.' 'Rip van Winkle,' of course. Shells. She put her pennies and her sixpences into bags dangling on the ends of fishing-rods. She put up her umbrella and she put it down. She put on her coat and she took it off. No Peter. No Betty either, which was somehow a mercy too. She was shown how to paddle and paddled. The afternoon wore on to tea-time; wore on to the prize-giving. Cheers then; pauses; cheers; little figures bowing over cups on the bank

opposite. Cheers, hooters, sirens. The final burst of all three.

She was safe now — if she wanted to be safe. She was safe now, surely.

In the Ladies' Toilet Room in the Clubhouse, as they tidied themselves up for dinner, Dorothy, powdering her face and reddening her lips, stood beside her at the looking-glass.

"Yes, I dare say I shouldn't either," Dorothy said — though Jane had made no comment — "I dare say I shouldn't either if I was allowed to. I shall have to rub all this off, you see, before I go home."

They were alone at the looking-glass, the others momentarily occupied with basins and towels at the farther end of the room.

"I see the force of your argument," Jane said, "I was only wondering why you didn't think yourself pretty enough as you are."

All this, however, in parenthesis, as she considered how to bring in Betty's name. She spoke it. "I sounded just now as if I didn't admire her. I think she's as lovely as you do."

"Oh, I knew that. Everyone must admire her. It's nonsense, isn't it, to think that women can't admire each other. Lots of women don't *like* her because every man she meets falls down before her. Did you know her husband? Of course, there's that darling

little boy. But she couldn't be expected not to marry again, could she?"

Was it coming? Jane held her breath.

"Do you think," Dorothy began, "do you think she is going to marry Mr. . . ."

It *was*, or rather it had been, and, even in that moment while it was still suspended, as it were, on Dorothy's now completed lips, Jane had had time to know that she was trembling; but it was at that precise moment that accident intervened; Mrs. Altringham rounding up her party for dinner.

"Ready, Jane? Ready, Dorothy? Amy, just pin this for me, will you? Then you, Jane, dear. That's right. Thank you. Now come along." She linked her arm in Jane's and led the way, the others following.

At dinner Jane sat between the man and the girl who had met Mrs. Altringham at the landing-stage and had been in her punt; an engaged couple, she gathered. Their names do not matter. What did matter was that, as they talked sometimes across her, though always including her in what they said, she had time to recover herself.

Dinner passed, like luncheon and like tea, without event. Johnny toasted her. Dorothy, separated from her by the length of the table, drank to her only with her eyes.

Dinner was over. They moved out on to

the lawn and sat in wicker chairs, and Dorothy, just too late to secure a chair next to her, talked to Mrs. Altringham. More music. More offertory bags dangled under their noses from boathooks or fishing-rods. 'Where do the Flies go in the Winter-time?' 'The Rosary.' 'Mississippi' again. 'The End of a Perfect Day.' Safe? Safe? The end, she told herself, was not yet.

Then a time of desultoriness while you waited for the skies to darken. The fireworks, it was said, would be spoiled — the set pieces, anyway. No matter, there would be the others. Smaller things which could be protected, rockets, Bengal lights. The sun had set behind clouds. The evening closed in.

Now they were in the punts again and on the water. Jane was in her blanket-coat (and 'glad of it'), and Dorothy nestled beside her amongst the cushions; but Amy Altringham, swathed in rugs, lay at their feet, and she could not ask her question. She was asking it of herself: 'Do I think she's going to marry whom?' That was what she was going to say when the chance should come. Well, she could wait . . . but now suddenly — or was it gradually? — waiting became difficult. Silence had descended upon the party. Even Johnny, paddling slowly behind her, was silent. She could hear the faint smooth sound of the water as

his paddle dipped into it and pushed it rhythmically back. The very soothingness of the sound was disturbing. The day so nearly over. Her time in London so nearly over . . . and nothing . . . nothing tangible. . . .

A song did for her — one of the Hawaiian songs that had come to London with a play and touched the Great Heart and so, incidentally, the Great Wistful Pocket. They had slowed down, then stopped, to listen. Three masked Pierrots and a Pierrette in a punt hung with lanterns. Super-Pierrots with ukuleles and Hawaiian guitars, and a piano that, tiny as it was, did not tinkle. Pierrette — Super-Pierrette, an exquisite wisp of a girl with an exquisite wisp of a voice, singing. Not pennies this time, when the bag should come round at the end of its fishing-rod, not sixpences. Shillings. Two-shilling pieces. Half-crowns. And how funny that was! To want to pay for what so disproportionately, so unaccountably unnerved you. You might laugh at yourself too — you who thought yourself musical! — that you should be affected by the calculated attack of such distilled sweetnesses as these! But these thrummings and hummings did unnerve you, let your superior self say what it would. Honolulu? Vailima? All that you had ever read or imagined of the Islands . . . the hackneyed Islands if your superior self must. . . .

There was Stevenson, after all, to bolster up your self-respect. Rupert Brooke. You were at least in good company. And, good gracious, you didn't care! If you chose to admire, you would admire. If you chose to be moved by the voice of an itinerant singer — 'itinerant,' where was the reproach in that, pray? — you would be moved and admit yourself moved; proclaim it; glory in it! But why were you angry? And why, above all, were you cruel? Why, for instance, when you felt Dorothy move nearer to you, did you move away on a pretence of giving her more room? When Dorothy whispered, "Oh, doesn't it make you want to cry?" why did you feel that you could have strangled her? Why did you deliberately turn to Johnny Lennox to ask what the song was when you knew that Dorothy equally could have told you?

'The Farewell to the Islands' from 'The Bird of Paradise.'

And why, when Dorothy began, with childish, breathless eagerness, to tell you how she loved that play, did you say 'H'ssh'? — howsoever gently. What you wanted to say was, 'Don't! Don't!' and not gently at all, you knew that; but whether to poor Dorothy for her interruption or to the singers for the intolerable sweetness of their song and the intolerable heart-breaking sweetness of the guitars — the reluctant, dragging sweetness of

the notes that trembled, each one of them, up a sliding scale of tones and semi-tones to a perfectly timed throbbing accuracy — you did not know. You just did not know. You knew only that all your unrest had come back, and that you were at the mercy of something you had spent the day in trying to ignore, in refusing to acknowledge, in definitely, if vainly, denying.

"Encore! Encore! Encore!"

The song was given again.

Twilight, twilight deepening to darkness. Jane's search had begun again, and soon she would not be able to see. As all day she had controlled her eyes to keep them from seeing, so now she strained them to see, raking the boats with them. Goodness, the precious hours that she had wasted! Peter! Peter! He must be there somewhere! Oh, he must be there! Nonsense to tell herself that because she had not seen him, he was not there to be seen. Had she seen the Super-Pierrots till just now, and they must have been there all day? There was hope for her in that. Yet, why should he be there? What should Henley mean to him who had probably seen numberless Henleys? No. No. No. She would not listen. He was *there* . . . somewhere . . . somewhere . . .

Dorothy was looking at her.

"Nothing," she said, "I didn't speak."

It was still light, but every moment it was getting darker. It was still light when the first rocket shot up suddenly from a bed, as it were, bristling with hisses which startled her. A serpent of ardent fire, it soared, soared, lost its tail, hung in the air, a mere point now, wavered, turned, and broke with a gentle plop into a shower of stars which lit up sky and river and landscape, but which, when they had faded, left all three dark. From that moment, as it seemed to Jane, twilight had become night.

The fireworks mattered to her now in relation only to the light they gave. When, with a spluttering and a crackling, a giant 'Catherine Wheel' burst into flame, she looked, not at it, but at the sea of boats about her. The more their own punt moved, the more she was pleased. Let the changes be rung — all possible changes! Let the kaleidoscope of shifting pieces be turned and turned, so that the mutations and permutations should be continuous, undelayed. When someone in Mrs. Altringham's punt managed, with a boathook, to get a grip of one of the piles, and Dorothy held on, keeping the two punts side by side, Jane could have screamed. But she did not scream. She said, 'Let go, Dorothy, dear. It's hopeless

trying to keep together in this crowd. You'll only tire your arm and we can always meet at the station.'

Oh, grant her patience! Dorothy's unsuspecting arm was not a bit tired. But an electric launch, moving slowly downstream, effected what Dorothy's innocent obtuseness promised to prevent. When the launch had passed, elbowing its way gently through the congestion of boats, the two punts were separated and her own was moving once more as Jane had wished.

"We've lost our place," Dorothy lamented.

"Never mind," Jane said. "We shall see better higher up."

They slid between a dingey and the gondola which had attracted Jane's attention earlier in the day. The changes she had wanted, fresh changes and always fresh changes if you kept moving. More rockets, more showers of stars, more abrupt radiances which allowed you to see.

"Look *ahead*, sir!"

Johnny's voice suddenly from behind her, addressed to the occupants of a skiff which was bearing down upon them obliquely in some as sudden release of tension for which the recent withdrawal of the launch was still indirectly responsible. Three men in this skiff, and one of them turning quickly, put-

ting out his hand to fend-off. She saw the hand first, the forearm from which the shirt-sleeve was rolled up, the throat, then the face. Her heart, as once before, seemed to stop beating. The outstretched hand came nearer. Its purpose she knew was only to push-off from the punt, to avoid collision, but in the bare moment of time, within the boundaries of which the whole incident was contained, it seemed to her that its dreadful purpose was, and was solely, to push her away. She could not bear it. The hand was on the gunwale beside her. She could have touched it. She did touch it. As if by mistake in putting out her own hand to fend-off also, she closed upon it. Her flesh and his for less than another moment — before her casual "Oh!" and her rapid "I beg your pardon" — were in warm contact. In warm, fainting contact.

Darkness. In it she closed her eyes and in a slow shivering sigh emptied her lungs of her pent breath. She lost count of time. An age might have passed before she began to breathe again, or only a few seconds.

"They're lighting the big set-piece"; Dorothy's voice across immense spaces — across an abyss filled with cracklings and splutterings. "I don't believe it will light, do you? It must be wet through, poor thing. Listen.

How it splutters! Listen. Look. It *is* lighting. Do look. It's lighting in places. Half of it's going to be left out. Sopping, I suppose. I say. Are you asleep?"

Jane opened her eyes, began to use them feverishly. But the crowd of the boats had swallowed him up. She knew that she was not to see him again.

Paddington Station. Johnny and the other men hunting for taxis. She wanted a taxi to herself, and knew that Johnny wanted to see her home. Mrs. Altringham, Victorian all at once, disposed of that. No, no, she said, she was going to drop her girls at their doors. Farewells, then. In the autumn when they all came back. Good-bye, Johnny. Good-bye So-and-So and So-and-So. Yes, it *had* been jolly. To their next merry meeting, and so on.

But one word with Dorothy in the taxi and under cover of the general chatter.

"Did I think Betty Tremlet was going to marry — who, did you say?"

Now for it. At last.

"Oh — Mr. Harborough of course. Martin Harborough."

"Harborough?" A pause. "*Martin* Harborough?"

"Yes. He's always there."

"Martin Harborough." She shook her head. "Has he any other name?"

Not that Dorothy had ever heard of. Why?

"Hasn't she ever spoken of him?"

Again Jane shook her head. She was thinking and could not think. But, if Martin Harborough was not Peter, she — why, she was free! So much even in her confusion seemed to be clear.

And now, having been a little bored with Dorothy, she wanted Dorothy. It was Dorothy she wanted to see again — to see, moreover, before she left London, and there was only to-morrow! She forced herself to think; thought rapidly.

"Well, it's all been delightful," she said, as if changing the subject, "and we must meet again, mustn't we? Could you lunch with me, perhaps, to-morrow?"

Dorothy gave a little whine like a puppy.

She was spending the day with a beastly aunt at Hampton Court. Wasn't that just her luck! Oh, if she had only known; if she could have foreseen.

"What on earth made me promise? I'd wire that I was ill, only Mother . . ."

"I wouldn't hear of that," said Jane sharply.

The questions, if there were any, must wait. After all, were there any, since what she

wanted most of all to know, or rather to believe, was that Mr. Harborough, whoever he was, was *not* Peter? To the autumn, then, when she was pig enough to realise that she might no longer want Dorothy.

The rest was a repetition of how much she and everyone else had enjoyed the day, how wise it had been to go in spite of the unpromising conditions of the weather, of thanks to a gratified hostess.

Clarges Street.

The day was over.

CHAPTER XIV

NEVERTHELESS, it was good to be home again. Jane's heart warmed to her hills and glowed to her little house. Her face and her limbs felt stiff as the car drew up before the door. Abel Tremlet, who had slept the last hour of the long drive, missing the pick of Jane's 'scenery,' opened his eyes and would have pretended that he had not been asleep, but Jane laughed at him. Ellen jumped down stiffly, caught her mistress's eye, and laughed at herself.

Mrs. Williams was at the door, curtseying and welcoming them. Jane got down stiffly also. Mr. Tremlet, refreshed by his sleep, was not stiff at all.

"The youngest of the lot of us," Jane said. "Cousin Abel, this is my Mrs. Williams whom I've told you about. Mrs. Williams, this is Mr. Tremlet, my cousin, who is honouring us all with a visit."

Mrs. Williams curtseyed again. Mr. Tremlet put out his hand.

"Mrs. Williams knows where to apportion the honour," Mr. Tremlet said.

"Tea, Mrs. Williams. Tea. No matter how late it is or how near dinner-time; tea. I'll

show Mr. Tremlet to his room, but he's not to stop to wash. We'll eat, dirty, as we are, and change afterwards."

"It's all ready, 'm."

"Ellen, show Anson the way round. I hope you'll be comfortable, Anson. I needn't tell Ellen to see that you have all that you want. Come along, Cousin Abel."

She linked her arm in his and led him in.

Five minutes later they were at the tea-table before the fire in the drawing-room. Here they found Sambo.

"I feel like the Queen of Sheba," Mr. Tremlet said, looking round. "The half had not been told me."

"Like it?"

"It's more than that. I begin to understand."

"Understand what?"

"Why, for — how many years was it? — you buried yourself. Upon my word! This young woman's possessions!" He addressed himself to Sambo. "Look at her teapot. Look at her cups! And she uses them! Dares to use them! Worcester, are they? Dr. Wall, if I'm not mistaken. What I don't understand, my dear, is, not why you haven't married, but why you haven't *been* married long ago — for your money."

"There must be reasons, mustn't there?

Besides, I haven't any. If I ever am — and who knows? — it will have to be, like the dead-and-gone heroines, for myself alone. Now, would you rather have whiskey?"

"I'd much rather have tea."

They ate an enormous tea, and smiled at each other.

Dinner would have to be put off, that was certain. They decided that a postponement of half an hour would be no use at all.

Jane rang for Ellen, who appeared, in her apron and cap, looking as if she had never been away at all.

"Ellen, Mr. Tremlet and I can't face another meal for at least an hour and a half. Would Mrs. Williams give me notice, do you think, if I put off dinner till nine?"

Ellen — who, if her mistress had been alone, would have played up with an "I *think* not, 'm. I'll see what I can do, 'm, shall I?" — said: "Nine o'clock, 'm. Very good."

So at nine o'clock, after baths and changes of raiment, they sat down to dinner and found themselves able to do very fair justice to what Mrs. Williams had provided for them. In the drawing-room after dinner they became frankly sleepy. The evening drowsed itself out very pleasantly till a quarter to eleven.

"Bed, Cousin Abel!"

"Bed, Cousin Jane."

Yes, mildly excited by the unusualness of visitors and thus with plenty to think about, safely — if you had not been too sleepy to think of anything at all — it was good to be home.

It was still good when Jane woke. But other thoughts began to come to her. Ellen, however, appearing with her morning tea, first diverted and presently dispersed them

"Yes, 'm. But isn't it funny and quiet? The quiet woke me, like the noise did at first in London — though I couldn't actually hear it from my room at the back. I knew it was going on, I suppose. All those thousands of people about you, I expect, and the traffic in the streets. Oh, I did like London, 'm. Anson says give him the country any day of the week. And he wants to know, 'm, may he valet Mr. Tremlet, 'm?"

"An excellent idea," Jane said.

"Then I'll tell him, 'm, and he'll bring him his tea. He's taken a tremendous fancy to Mr. Tremlet, and, if you'll excuse him, 'm, to you too. He says you're one in a thousand. Not that *I* couldn't have told him that, 'm."

Jane laughed and watched her, contemplatively, as she busied herself about the room, drawing the curtains, tidying the dressing-table, laying out clothes, and finally going

to the door for a can of hot water — which, Jane believed, was handed to her by someone outside. She caught her eye, and Ellen blushed.

"Like to think they're being useful, 'm, don't they? I have to smile. He's been helping Mrs. Williams in the kitchen."

So, with the unconscious help of Ellen, and, perhaps, of the domestic Anson also, were the thoughts warded off. She finished her tea and got up. The day greeted her at the open window. Her beloved garden. Her flowers. Roses. Delphiniums. Heliotrope. She would have gone down to them in her dressing-gown, but she must hurry that she might leave the bathroom free for her guest. Coming back from it, she paused at his door, to call to him that it was at his disposal.

But, for this morning, at least, would he not have his breakfast brought up to him?

Gracious no, bless her kind heart.

"And, come in, my dear."

She went in and found Sambo established upon his bed. It all 'helped.' She was happier than she could have thought possible.

Breakfast. A smell of bacon and tea and hot rolls. Scents, too, from the garden, coming in through the open window. Was there a care in the world?

The happy mood promised to last. Was

she conscious, perhaps, that she even manœuvred to make it last? — putting off thoughts; putting up the happy barrier between her and thoughts. Anyway, she would not think yet. She would not think till she must. That the hour would come in which she would be forced to think, she knew all too well, fill her days as she might. Meanwhile, with her guest and her garden and the threads of Aberllwyn to pick up, her days were like to fill themselves. Her arm linked with her old cousin's, or his with hers, she led him round the house or paced the grass terraces.

"A little Strawberry Hill," he said. "A little paradise."

No Walpole to give a touch of worldliness to this Strawberry Hill. But no Serpent in the Garden? For a moment a Dove. The word had gone round that she was back. A reconnoitring dove that very afternoon; Miss Rod of the Bank, words, for an olive leaf, in her kind fussy old beak.

Miss Rod had met Miss Lewis, who had met Mrs. Vaughan Rees, who had heard from Mrs. Roberts, who had seen the car with Miss Weston — *and* a Gentleman! — drive up to the door. She must, then, she thought, just pop in as she was, to pass the time of day, and give her dear Miss Weston welcome.

Age-honoured shibboleths of the Parish

Pump! But Jane heard them strangely. And what had come to her — or over her — that, hearing them now, she wanted to laugh? This was, of course, the way in which things did happen and were recorded, and had always happened and had always been recorded at Aberllwyn. But Miss Rod herself — had her appearance always been quite so remarkable? Was it possible that, a bare few weeks since, her bugles (where did she get them?) and her dolman of ceremony (and the mid-nineties) had seemed matters of course and not, as they appeared to-day, the trappings of a Dame of pantomime? — Jack's Mother? The Baroness? Nay, even the redoubtable Widow Twankay?

She gauged in that moment — in which, however, as perhaps need not be said, she did not laugh — the immeasurable distances she had travelled. But she allowed herself to seek and hold her cousin's eye as she said, smiling gravely:

"And this is the Gentleman."

Her cousin, Mr. Tremlet, Miss Rod.

Mr. Tremlet said he had heard of Miss Rod, and Miss Rod, her bugles jingling, blossomed to the presence of a Gentleman.

As from a point of vantage then, Jane, amused, and — to do her no more than justice — a little bit ashamed of herself for being

amused, watched the old conditions reëstablishing themselves. In five minutes she had heard all the familiar doings of the neighbourhood. Names tripped off Miss Rod's tongue — each with its formal prefix: Mr., Mrs., Miss. She herself, after twelve years, was Miss Weston to Miss Rod. Difficult to believe that three days ago she had been 'Janey' to 'Johnny' whom she had met then for the first time. And what, by like token, would Miss Rod have thought of her if she could have known that, that very morning, in her dressing-gown, mules on bare feet, she had sat on the end of the Gentleman's bed and smoked a cigarette with him?

But Miss Rod, hazarding only that Miss Weston would find the country very quiet after London, was conscious, it was plain, of no change. And there, if she wasn't forgetting the really exciting thing that had happened since Miss Weston went away! Miss Weston had not heard?

Miss Weston had not heard.

Miss Rod gathered herself up for an announcement.

Plas Llwyn. The new people had moved in.

Never had Jane felt so disingenuous. Disingenuousness seemed to be forced upon her. Olive leaf of olive leaves in the benevolent beak. Olive leaf of olive leaves laid at her

sophisticated feet, and, because her feet were sophisticated, she felt no thrill.

To make amends, to please Miss Rod (but in some sort, as she knew, also to humour her), Jane magnified the interest she felt so faintly in Miss Rod's news.

"Already?" she said, and added, "That *is* exciting," because in fact she felt, and was conscious of feeling, so little excited. Plas Llwyn, home of the Great Ones, was, and remained, so remote.

Miss Rod blossomed further.

"To think," she was saying, "that it should fall to me to have the gratification of being the first to tell you! When I heard, I said to myself, 'How interested our Miss Weston will be!' for it was at my little tea-party, if you remember, that we all heard that Lord Barmouth had sold the place. We were quite upset, Mr. Tremlet. Such a bolt, as it were, from the blue. The Barmouths. Such an old-established family, and what might we not get in exchange? North Wales so regrettably handy for the industrial centres, and in these days of Profiteers and the New Rich that we hear so much about in the papers! But as I said to Mrs. Vaughan Rees, dear Miss Weston, we *see* now. We should have had faith in our good Lord Barmouth, who might have been trusted not to let us down. Yes. Friends of

his own, Miss Weston — charming people of the name of Mount-Ross, burnt out of their old home in Ireland and, thus, glad to buy the place, lock, stock, and barrel. You can guess, Mr. Tremlet, what a relief to us — to me particularly, perhaps, having known the house so well in old Lord Barmouth's time, when with my dear father I used to dine there once or twice a year regularly — what a relief, I say, to find everything so little changed."

Mr. Tremlet, behaving admirably, said that he could guess, and Jane felt prouder of him than of herself; for, if Plas Llwyn was nothing to her, it was less than nothing to him, and her own thoughts had begun to wander. She took herself to task with at least an attempt at severity. This was her real life, she reminded herself — not London. She was 'Miss Weston' again, not 'Jane,' certainly not 'Janey.' It was her duty to be interested. She would stand no nonsense from herself, let her understand that! What, pray, was she that, after five or six weeks of holiday, a dance or two, an occasional dinner at a restaurant, a few theatres and concerts, the Park, a day at Henley — glimpses, in short, of a life to which she did not nor would ever belong — she should presume to feel aloof and even superior? Let her be ashamed of herself!

But Miss Rod had called! "We decided,

dear Miss Weston, that it would only be neighbourly. Mrs. Vaughan Rees and I hired the wagonette."

Not entirely forgetting her prejudices, it seemed, Miss Rod had called!

A little hurriedly Jane asked appropriate questions.

Colonel and Mrs. Mount-Ross and Family. And Miss Rod, who spent three weeks in September every year — the quiet time when the trippers had gone — at one of the nicer Boarding Houses at Llandudno, did put it that way.

"Young people?" Jane asked.

A son and two daughters. Miss Rod had as yet seen only the second daughter, an elegant young creature still in the schoolroom. A little inclined to giggle, it was true; but an elegant young creature. She could not think, it had seemed when her mother asked her, where the others could be, and Mrs. Mount-Ross had seemed quite vexed.

Abel Tremlet shifted in his chair, and Jane turned in hers a little more towards her visitor.

"We had tea under the cedar on the lawn. It seemed quite like old times. And after tea Mrs. Mount-Ross took us round the house. Some little changes, of course, but I was able to tell her where the pianoforte had stood in old Lord Barmouth's time, and some of the

larger pieces of furniture; for as you know, dear Miss Weston, I could never quite accustom myself to some of the present Lady Barmouth's arrangements. I like to think I may have been a little assistance to a new-comer who would naturally wish to have everything right."

It was Mr. Tremlet who found a steady voice in which to say "Quite so," for Jane, for no particular reason except that he was there, and, for one terrible moment in which her good manners were in desperate jeopardy, found herself without power of speech. Even as she fought down her inclination to hysteria — pinching herself like any school-girl, holding her breath like a child with a hiccough — her imagination, deaf to her pleadings, merciless to her state, was reconstructing the visit.

The wagonette from the Bull and Unicorn. Old Pugh's rusty cockade. Miss Rod's best bonnet. Mrs. Vaughan Rees's younger hat from what was known locally as the 'Bon Marsh' ('Maisonne Pareesienne') at Aberystwyth. The two covering dust-cloaks to be discarded at the door. The white kid gloves which would be put on before the lodge gates came into sight. Heaven deliver her! Miss Rod's ivory card-case in readiness . . .

"For pity's sake!" she said to herself.

Her imagination, the bit firmly between its teeth, had no pity for her.

"For very shame!"

Her imagination knew no shame.

Yet it came to her assistance.

"Sambo!" she said, rising suddenly. "They've shut him in somewhere. I must see."

When she came back (Sambo for 'evidence' under her arm) it was with a bright colour, but a very respectable imitation of calmness, and a bunch of her best roses for her visitor.

Miss Rod took an unsuspecting departure. All was well.

They looked at each other. Mr. Tremlet shook his head.

"No more control of herself," he said, speaking of Jane and addressing Sambo, "no more control of herself than a child of ten! Worse, no more control of herself than an Elegant Young Creature at the age when — well . . .! Words, Sambo, fail me — perhaps happily fail me. That good kind woman pops in — as she is — to give her welcome and — Jane, you little devil, how dared you! Taking to your wicked heels, seeking cover for your shamelessness, leaving me — your guest, if you please — exposed, succourless, not only to preserve my own dignity, but to save the family honour. You deserved that I should have disgraced it. And, by Gad, I nearly did

— when I thought of you, somewhere near, out of sight, doubled up . . ."

Homeric laughter, Johnsonian laughter, broke out. Jane threw her scruples, her better feelings, common decency, to the winds and joined him. They laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks; they laughed till they were weak; till they could laugh no more; and even then they laughed.

Two ill-behaved children. Two ill-behaved, cruel children. An old man whose years should have made such levity unthinkable. Jane old enough at least to know better. Yet how happy they were! The old man regains his youth — as Jane, by the way, had promised that he should! Jane, grave beyond her years, for twelve of them, recaptures lightness of heart. The end justifying the means? — sanctifying them? Poor Miss Rod. Underneath, Jane was really ashamed. But was she penitent? She was not penitent. No, in the view of results, she was not penitent. Something to be said for Indulgences. And Miss Rod herself — ridiculous but dear Miss Rod — could she, if she had known (which God forbid!) — could she, if it had been possible that she could understand — could even she have grudged two mainly good-hearted, though for once wholly reprehensible, persons this fleeting ecstasy?

With a sigh at last, exhausted, spent — too much tired to argue further — Jane accepted such meagre absolution as the sophistry afforded her, and eagerly, clutchingly, that she might have a shred of self-respect with which to cover her nakedness, left it at that.

She would get through her days.

CHAPTER XV

BUT would she?

Peter in London at the vaporous mercy of Betty's incalculable moods. Betty in London for at least, as Jane gathered from her cousin, another fortnight.

What might not happen in that fortnight? She knew the power of Betty's blandishments. Little beautiful *fleur de mal*. She knew only too well the power of Peter's appeal to the senses. She knew everything. Was there anything that she did not know?

Reaction from the laughter of the afternoon may have laid her open to attack. Be this as it may, her thoughts, lying in wait for any sign of weakness, seized what may have seemed their opportunity and sprang upon her out of their ambush. They had had time to mobilise. They came, then, not singly, but in battalions. Receding also, but the better to spring, they had not miscalculated. They had found their moment.

Jane, fighting them, yielding to them, fighting them again, paced the floor of her room; went, like a leading lady of the drama of the flamboyant eighties, from one piece of furniture to another; crossed, in short, recrossed,

sat, rose; 'sank' into this chair or that; 'subsided' on to her sofa; 'collapsed' upon her bed; behaved, indeed, for an unmeasured time, after Ellen had left her for the night, as if she had been veritably crazy.

And so small a thing had undone her: no more than the accidental touching of a man's hand — Anson's, upon the handle of a door which he was opening for her as she turned from giving him his orders for the next day. But, for her, it was not the touching of his hand at all, but, once more, the desperate touching (which had not been accidental!) of another hand altogether.

"I beg pardon, 'm. A quarter to twelve, then, to-morrow."

"A quarter to twelve — unless, of course, it should rain, but it won't."

She gained her room tranquilly, dismissed the ministering Ellen, and was alone. But the mischief was done.

What had possessed her to leave London!

She had found Peter and left him. She had gone out to look for him and left him at the moment when she had found him. The old ground that she had gone over so many times. Not an inch of it that she was to be spared going over again. Her thoughts had the whip hand now and drove her where they would. Under the lash she was goaded from one wall

to another of the four which made her prison. That her prison, its door unbolted, its windows unbarred, was not a prison at all — mere symbol of an exile into which she had entered voluntarily — was small solace to her. It was prison enough to her for the night of her castigation. She writhed under her impotence and the smarts and stings of a cruel lash.

What was Peter doing at that moment — what Betty? The thought that they might be together — dancing, perhaps? — Betty in his arms, her long slim hand in the hand which she had touched with her own, and the momentary contact with which had, it seemed to her now, burnt her flesh — was more than she could bear. Oh, having found that hand, she should never have released it, though it should have, indeed, seared her flesh. Should have clung to it till, in silence, perhaps, or perhaps with a name, the name of a book, breathed rather than spoken, she had swung the owner of it back across the years and made herself known to him. If he could be supposed miraculously to have remembered! He would, she believed, have remembered. She shut her eyes. She could have left him then; a drop of something, that was at least clean and beneficent, as against the baneful drop of Betty's insidious poison, to work in him . . .

Up and down, backward, forward, this way

and that, she was driven. The night was wearing thin, light beginning to creep wanly round the edges of the curtains, when at last she crept into bed; to lie awake, for a time, but presently to sleep the sleep of complete exhaustion.

The morning found her listless. What matter? What did anything matter? There was nothing that she could do, as there had been nothing that she could have done. She contemplated the clear field which she had left to Betty without interest. She contemplated Betty, even, indifferently, feeling no animosity towards her meanwhile.

Ellen again, with her tea, and, though she responded but lackadaisically, she was conscious of the cheerful atmosphere which Ellen brought into the room with her and shed about it. The day, moreover, as the drawn curtains revealed it to her, was bright and sunny.

Ellen said, "You'll have a fine day for your drive, 'm. Anson says there was a mist over the valley when he got up, and it has all cleared off now. What will you wear, 'm? I should put on your medium tweed, 'm. It's never any too warm, 'm, motoring, and you can always take off or loosen your coat, 'm, if need be."

Jane said her medium tweed would do very nicely. She was hardly attending, and would probably have said the same thing if it had been her thinnest cotton or her thickest home-spun that Ellen had suggested to her. One dress was the same as another. It was an effort to think of dressing at all. The incident of the hot-water can and the unseen hand behind the door repeated itself, but she felt no amusement. She did not watch Ellen this morning. She ate her slice of bread-and-butter and drank her tea. She felt better then, but still battered and bruised, and when she had had her bath, did not pause at her cousin's door, but went back to her room and finished dressing.

When all was done, she paused and surveyed herself in the glass. Telltale traces of her vigil were evident in the paleness of her face and in the shadows round her eyes. That they would not be lost upon the shrewd but kindly perceptions of her cousin was inevitable. Foolish, if she wished to avoid attention, not at least to have knocked at his door as she passed; more foolish still not to have gone in to him while her cheeks were still flushed, if ever so faintly, from the stimulus of her bath. There was no help for it, however: she must go down.

He made no comment, but she knew that he

had noted the omission, and that, scenting something of unusualness in her mood, he did not fail to observe her looks and connect the one with the other.

"Miss Rod is avenged," she said, as she gave him his cup.

"Miss Rod? You poor dear. You had a bad night?"

She nodded.

"Paid for my laughter, paid and paid. I didn't get to sleep till goodness knows when. For once the mills of the gods ground quickly."

Mr. Tremlet, looking at her, did not say that all the same they appeared to have ground exceeding small. Instead, he pointed out that he, joint-sinner with her, had got off scot free, which, he declared, was manifestly unfair.

"For I had no twinges of conscience — not one, nor have I since. More, I gloried in my offence and glory in it still. I haven't had such a brain-clearing, soul-renewing, vitalising orgy of laughter for more years than I can tell, and it has taken ten off my age and probably added ten more to my life. I owe Miss Rod and you, my dear — you, for provocation in spite of your scruples! — a debt I can never repay. Think of it! To find that one had it in one to laugh like that at seventy-odd. To be swept off one's respectable feet and whisked back to one's forgotten boyhood at

threescore and ten! Unseemly, of course. Indecent. That's the exquisite joy of it. What would life be without its delicious little indecencies?"

So between them they pretended, each knowing that the other was pretending, each using poor Miss Rod as a blind; but so, by mutual tactfulnesses and playings-up generally, were they able to behave as if one of them had been suffering from no more than the loss of an hour's sleep, and — the point at pretended issue was here! — for wholly inadequate reasons.

Jane, grateful to her old cousin as so many times she had had occasion to be grateful to him, felt her spirits recovering from their depression and her looks returning to her. By the time he, upon his part, had eaten a couple of kidneys and an egg, and she, upon hers, had played with a piece of toast, but consumed a peach, she felt really better. He suggested putting off the car, but she would not hear of that. Had she not to get through her day? Her thoughts would come back to her, but, scuttling through the air, and with a pretext now for preoccupation or for any other unusualness which she might show, she could face them. The wakeful night she had confessed to was explanation enough for any signs of an indisposition which it might be beyond

her powers to conceal. A day in the open air, she said, was just what she needed.

As twelve o'clock struck from the church-tower, the car came round. Ellen put in rugs and coats, Anson the hamper. The car started and, running smoothly, sped down the road, where the gorse on each side of it filled the air with its fragrance, and where Ellen had had the adventure which indirectly — and not so very indirectly, either! — had had its part in sending her mistress out upon hers. But for Ellen, perhaps, with of course Mr. Morgan, and even Miss Rod, Jane would not have been at that moment in a car at all or beside her old cousin — least of all beside her old cousin. How strange that was! Anson, even, was involved. How strange, how passing strange!

"Better, Jane, my dear?"

"Worlds better. I was thinking. Here we are, and less than two months ago I didn't know you."

"Things happen, Jane."

"Do you think they do?"

"Things happen."

"But other things happen."

"Not only other things. Things. The things we want. The things even that we don't know that we want. Could I have thought when Geoffrey died that life could hold anything more for me? Anything that I could care

about, or care for? Well, it held you, and in its good time it produced you. That's what I mean. How much more, then — though I won't pretend there are no holes in my argument — the things that we know we want. What I'm trying to say is that you will get your wish."

"There's no deceiving you, is there, Cousin Abel? You're quite right. Last night I thought I shouldn't. Say that again."

"You'll get your wish."

"Say it the third time."

"You'll get your wish."

Jane let the words sink in.

"But the point, my dear, is that you should say it yourself."

She heard that in silence.

"Last night," she said after a little pause, "every reason there could possibly be why I shouldn't came to me and shouted in my ears. I had bungled things in London as I had bungled them once before."

"Would you like to go back, Jane?"

"Go back? To London, do you mean? Oh, I couldn't."

"Why not? Just because you've left it? Because you've brought me down to stay with you? What of that? I'd go back with you."

"N-no," she said, after a longer pause.

"There's nothing I could do. No. But it's just like you to have thought of it, and if it should happen that — that I should want to . . . no, if it should happen that I should feel that I must, I would take you at your word and tell you."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright."

"One thing more, then, and we're done."

"What's that?"

"Think."

Jane thought. But she could not think. She turned to him with a puzzled smile.

"I give it up," she said at last.

"That's it. Or rather that's rather what you've got not to do. Think again."

"I shall get my wish," she said slowly.

"Dismiss!"

They talked of other things, but, for Jane, the whole aspect of the day and of the world had changed. It was from that moment that peace descended upon her, wrapped her round, soothed her — a peace as different from the numbness, to which she had waked that morning, as light is from darkness, as sweet from bitter, as joy from sorrow. And out of her peace something was being born in her, and born without the pains of labour. A little seed, a little spark of hope? Of more than hope? Of

expectation? Of sure and certain expectation!

She should get her wish?

Magic of the spoken word? The word made, as it were, flesh? Was it true? Did such things — miracles — happen?

She was, perhaps, for that moment or two, in a sort of trance. In it, as in dreams, familiar phrases, detached from their rightful contexts, came to her with the aptness and glibness of *clichés*, but, as to the dreamer, bearing, or seeming to bear, the significance of revelations. Such phrases now whispered themselves to her, fraught with new and relevant meaning. 'Only believe' was one of them. 'According to your faith be it unto you,' another. And 'he that seeketh findeth,' a third.

A jolt to the car woke her to a sense of her surroundings. They were crossing the little humped bridge into the village. Caps were touched to her; the cap of the blacksmith, one of Ellen's three admirers, who were none of them to get their wish. A black clerical hat was raised to her: the hat of Mr. Morgan, who was not to get his. Holes, it was clear, in her old cousin's argument! But no matter. She was not to be discouraged. She was not going to see the holes — not though his argument should be a very net for holes — a lot of holes, in the schoolboy's immortal definition — a lot of holes tied together with string! Not if the

very string that tied the holes together should itself be rotten!

But something, in the momentary glimpse of Mr. Morgan's face as she smiled and waved to him, caught at her heart — tugged at it. In the abounding sunshine and his black clothes he looked pale and lonely. Her conscience smote her. He, too, with Ellen and Miss Rod, was in her unpayable debt. He most of all. Was it this, however, or expediency merely — the opportunity which chance encounter afforded her of reëstablishing relations with him upon a workable footing — that made her lean forward impulsively and stop the car? Not the one, perhaps, more than the other: her strange sense of personal happiness, and, with that, a grateful sympathy with a fellow creature to whom she had caused even a passing unhappiness. In her own happiness — though why was she happy? — why? — she wanted no one to be unhappy. She could not give him his wish — if his wish were still his wish? — but she could show him (under cover always, it was true, of the protection which a third person afforded her!) that her friendly relations with him were unimpaired. With mixed motives, then, she bade Anson stop, and waited, leaning over the hood of the car, till he should come up with it.

"Back, you see, from my travels, Mr.

Morgan, and so glad to see the face of an old friend And I want to make you and my cousin Mr. Tremlet known to each other."

"A great plea-sure," Mr. Morgan said with his Welsh accent — "a great plea-sure to see Miss Wes-ton amongst us once more." They shook hands. "How do you do, Mr. Tremlet? Your first vi-sit to these parts?"

He was making a brave but, to Jane, an obvious effort.

"Mr. Tremlet is the fairing that I've brought back with me from London. Yes, his first visit, but I want to ensure that it shan't be his last, so I'm going to show him the country. One of my few relations, Mr. Morgan. Mr. Tremlet knew my mother when she was a girl."

"There wass a grand woman. Oh, a grand woman. A great lady. A pri-vi-lege to have known her, Mr. Tremlet, and to meet her rela-tion."

"Yes, I knew Miss Weston's mother before she married," Mr. Tremlet said cordially, responding, however, rather to Jane's intention, and to his affectionate memories, than to any very active interest in the stiff, even awkward figure in the road. "She was, indeed, all that you say."

"You'll come in and see us," Jane said, "and advise me about what Mr. Tremlet

ought to see while he's here. Mr. Morgan is a walking map of North Wales, Cousin Abel. There isn't an inch of it that he doesn't know. To-day, for a beginning, Barmouth, I thought, for the sake of the road to Dolgelly, and back, perhaps, if we've time, by — How do you do, Miss Rod?"

Miss Rod had emerged from the post-office. She joined the group, fluttering, and, between shakings of hands and comments upon the weather, said that Miss Weston and Mr. Tremlet were going motoring were they not?

Her string bag held bananas and a packet of postcards, but Jane resisted a temptation to say that Miss Rod had been shopping?

Instead she resumed her outline of the day's programme, addressing herself equally to her and to Mr. Morgan.

"Aberdovey," Miss Rod said. "Yes, Mr. Tremlet must see the Happy Valley. And then home by Dinas Mawddy? You'll be quite near Plas Llwyn. Dear, dear, there now! If you had thought of it, such an opportunity to have called."

"Thought of it? Oh, I see. I'm not dressed for visiting."

Miss Rod looked doubtful.

"Perhaps if you took off your veil, dear Miss Weston. And Mrs. Mount-Ross would no doubt understand that motoring . . ."

She broke off, looking from Jane to Mr. Morgan, who was saying gallantly that Mrs. Mount-Ross — they might be quite sure — would feel honoured to see Miss Weston in whatever she might be wearing.

"Indeed, yes," said Miss Rod, "but a first visit. And I was thinking rather of Miss Weston, who would naturally have liked . . ." She broke off again and turned to Jane, smiling indulgently. "Gentlemen," she said, "don't understand these things, do they, Miss Weston? Why, probably you haven't even your card-case."

"No," Jane said, "I haven't even my card-case!"

So it came, however, that into the potentialities of the day's programme, there entered the first thought of calling at Plas Llwyn; nay, that into Jane's mind, as something that must be envisaged, there entered the thought of calling there at all. Afterwards, perhaps, she was to think — but what was she not to think of the seeming chances of this surprising day? If, for example, she had not stopped to talk to Mr. Morgan, if Miss Rod had not come out of the post-office at that precise moment. . . . That there were no chances? That every smallest happening was ordained? Nonsense! That in life, as in a tapestry, there was a

pattern in which though you could see only the meaningless bit of it exposed to you, every stitch was ultimately to show itself to have been contributing to the balanced rhythm of a considered scheme? She did not so flatter herself! And yet . . . What was she to Plas Llwyn? What the Mount-Rosses to her? What, incidentally, the Barmouths? How could it have been conceived that the sale of the place, allowing even for the mutations consequent upon the exchange of one owner for another could have the remotest bearing upon her?

Not, of course, an inkling of any of this now. Only the continued sense of an unexplained well-being and the consciousness of a strange and wholly unreasoned excitement. It was the sunshine. It was her beloved hills. It was the exhilaration of the rapid motion through the air It was the beauty of the ever-changing landscape. It was old Abel's presence beside her, and his iterated and reiterated testification to his delight in the massed loveliness of the scenery through which they were passing. It was all these things, but it was also none of them. What was it, then?

"Did I say too much?"

"You didn't say enough. I'm more than ever Queen of Sheba to your Solomon."

"But you should see my hills in the spring. Next year you shall come to me in May, when the young larch is just out and the cuckoo is calling. When I make a world, by the way, the birds shall sing all the summer."

"When you make a world the birds will sing all the year round."

Jane went into a happy reverie, not consciously considering Miss Rod. She came out of it, however, chuckling.

"I think," she said, "because we're not dressed for visiting and because I haven't got a card-case, that we *will* call at Plas Llwyn."

Her cousin smiled.

A woman's reasons, he said, were always unanswerable.

"It wouldn't bore you? We shall be quite near, coming back. And I see that I shall have to, some time. I may as well get it over."

They decided that Jane might as well get it over.

Thus, even, of a sort of amused perversity!

Dear Miss Rod. She at least should have her wish, if not quite with the formalities with which she would have liked it to be endowed.

"But I'll tell her," Jane said, "that I took off my veil and that Mrs. Mount-Ross quite understood."

"And if the good lady is not at home?"

"A little pantomime for the benefit of the

butler and the two footmen. Miss Weston fumbles for her tortoiseshell card-case and finds to her dismay that she has forgotten it. She writes her name on the back of an envelope with messages of profound apology to the châtelaine. It will be Miss Rod then who must understand."

"That I should be called upon to countenance such duplicity!"

"That I, rather, should be called upon to call! That poor Mrs. Mount-Ross, who probably doesn't want to be bothered with any of us, should be called upon to return my visit! Plas Llwyn, whether the Barmouths reign there or the Mount-Rosses, remains Plas Llwyn; and The Bank and my own little house remain The Bank and Miss Weston's cottage."

It was all great fun, Mr. Tremlet said, and Jane, though she made a grievance of the exacted visit, made but a mock grievance. She was in a mood — the reaction, perhaps, of the night's batterings — to be amused with everything, anything, or nothing.

"After all," she said contemplatively, "we shall see if the piano has been moved" — but broke into ripples of laughter when her cousin hazarded that Miss Rod — was he right — had not entirely approved of Lady Barmouth?

"And why, may I ask, do you 'augh?"

"I think I must tell you. Lady Barmouth once had the misfortune — Mother, of her adorable impishness, always said the glory — of telling Miss Rod a story which shocked her. Miss Rod thought the story immodest. 'At her own tea-table,' she said — 'at the tea-table in her own drawing-room in mixed company, gentlemen present!'"

"And the story?"

For Jane had paused. He looked at her.

"Not, I hope too immodest for you to tell me!"

But not on that score was Jane hesitating. She had paused, arrested by a dreadful misgiving. If, even indirectly, she should be supposed to have been reminded of it by a recent meeting! Not for worlds . . .

She was committed, however, and proceeded: "Well, then," plunging, "there is a diocesan conference in the county and amongst the clergy who are put up for the night at the Big House of the neighbourhood — Mother always chose to say Plas Llwyn, but it wasn't! — are a little Welsh parson and his wife, of the name of Evans. The little man is rather overawed by the grandeurs — the servants, the silver, the larger pieces of furniture, let us say — and conversation is difficult at dinner, but the next morning at breakfast, in

brave compliment and one of those pauses that lie in wait for the diffident, he finds his tongue: 'What beau-ti-ful big beds you have, Lady So-and-So! So *wide!* I stretched out my hand in the night and I said, "Where are you, Mrs. Ef-fance?" for' — beaming around — 'indeed, I could not find her.' . . ."

Jane now began to know that she was hungry, and Anson was told to look out for a suitable spot for luncheon. In the shade of some trees a halt was made, and the luncheon basket unpacked. There, back from the road, but near enough to see it and to be diverted by its occasional traffic, they ate their hard-boiled eggs and cold chicken. Jane, hostess though she was, thought what Mrs. Williams had provided tasted delicious.

"Chablis or whiskey?"

"Chablis."

The golden wine looked like molten sunshine in their glasses.

Abel Tremlet lifted his to Jane.

"To your Heart's Desire!" he said, and drank deeply.

Even this, afterwards! Even the colour which mounted to her cheeks as she bowed to the toast!

Why was she so happy?

Nothing had happened.

But out of a silence, when they had eaten and were filled, old Abel Tremlet, taking his cigar from his lips and examining it as if its shape or texture presented some special interest for him, said casually, "And so you decided that you could not marry Mr. Morgan."

This wicked old man!

"If you think . . ." she began.

He turned his cigar in his wicked old fingers.

"If I think . . .?"

"That Mr. Morgan was Mr. Evans . . ."

"Or that he even put the story into your mind, you'll never forgive me. Is that it?"

"Neither you nor myself.

But this Wizard!

How did he know?

"I haven't told you," she said blankly, and, as she had said once before, "I'm not telling you."

"No, you haven't told me, most loyal of Janes. *He* told me, if you want to know. He chiefly, anyway. Not immediately. Something in his face as I thought of it. Afterwards. At the moment, to be quite honest, he did not greatly interest me. I saw no more than was visible to an eye which is not really so discerning as you think. But I know you, Jane, my dear, and your scrupulous tender heart, and you may remember that you paused . . . When I had heard your delicious story, I

knew why. You wouldn't be angry with me for teasing you if you knew one portion of the worshipping respect I have for you."

"Am I forgiven?" he asked presently, his eyes twinkling.

Jane nodded.

"Then one thing I want to say."

"Yes?"

"I may say it?"

"Yes."

"He's a good man — I can see that. But — bear with me! — your old cousin could never have given his consent."

"He's worth ten of me," Jane said.

"That may be, but he wouldn't have done for my Jane."

So to smiles again and well-being in the best of all possible worlds. She had needed no reassurance, but she felt reassured.

Anson had finished his luncheon and was smoking his cigarette on a bank within hail of the car. A motor passed every now and then on the road, and an occasional char-à-banc, and sympathetic interested glances were turned in their direction. The occupants of one char-à-banc waved to them, and Jane, entering into the spirit of what was again a holiday mood, waved back.

"Cockney!"

"The insidious influence of your London."

"The wantonness! Who knows! You may, for all you care, have turned the head of some little Welsh clerk."

"My own is spinning," Jane said.

It was. Excitement possessed her. She had not a care in the world. Was something, indeed, going to happen to her?

She called to Anson. The basket was repacked. They took to the road.

More 'scenery.' More exclamations. Jane was proud of the country she had to show. Every prospect pleased and not even man was vile. Not even the serried rows of trippers in the monstrous ungainly cars which bore down upon you so threateningly, filling the whole road to all appearance, but miraculously, when the moment came for passing, giving you room to pass; or the vibrating goggled, drab-clad riders of the tuff-tuffing, frenzied motor-bicycles. In such a world and on such a day there was place for all.

"Your mother must have loved this country."

"She saw so little of it. After the first few months she hardly got out at all. A drive tired her. We had to give up driving. She sat in the garden. She loved that and the views. She never tired of those. She would sit and work or read, and put down her work or her

book to watch the changing lights on the hills. When I look back, it seems extraordinary to me how contented she was, and how unresistingly she settled down to her illness. It's an odd thing to say, but in a sort of way I think she enjoyed it. She wasn't a bit upset when the specialist we had down told her, entirely against his will, that she would never be active again. She insisted on knowing — brushed aside all the vaguenesses he wanted to put her off with; *made* him tell her. He told me that he believed she was pleased, and I really believe she was. When he was gone, you might have thought that what he had had to say was that there was nothing the matter with her."

She paused and smiled.

"Do you know what I think it was?"

"Not till you tell me."

"I think it was the house."

"The house?"

Jane nodded.

"It enthralled her — from the first moment. It was as if it was something she had waited for, without knowing it, all her life. But there's more in my theory than that. You know how, after my father's death, we had always moved about. Well, I believe that was why. She was waiting — always without knowing it — for the house; and the house, though she didn't know that either, was waiting for her."

Abel Tremlet appeared to consider her words.

"It helped, you mean, to reconcile her to the doctor's verdict?"

"No, I don't. Or rather I mean a great deal more than that. Far, far more. It made her welcome his verdict, urge for it, demand it. She adored it — the house — with a sort of passion; it, everything in it. She used to touch the things. I can see her with her hands round a cup or a bowl or china figure — cupping her hands themselves about it. A caress. Everything was right, she said. She used to wander round the rooms — and not only just at first; often and often; going from one thing to another. I've seen her touch the drop-handles of the writing-table in the window and set them gently swinging, one after another, like an interested child. And later, when she could not walk, I would see her looking slowly round, making a happy progress in her imagination. It was the same in her bedroom when she couldn't leave her bed. I've seen her put down her work to examine the damask curtains of her bed, and stroke them; or to follow, with her finger, the pattern of the old faded wall-paper. Nothing ever gave anyone such inexhaustible pleasure as the unexpected possession of this house. It satisfied her. And that's not the word, it filled and fulfilled her.

She wanted to know that she would never leave it. She *wanted* to be promised, do you see, that she would die in it."

"So *she*," Abel Tremlet said after a long pause, "so she had *her* wish."

And so, upon this strangest day, did things lead round . . .

They fell into silence — he thinking of her, speculating; she thinking of her mother. Out of it she said suddenly: "Do you think she could have been in love with James Tremlet?"

"She was in love with your father."

"But he — James Tremlet — was in love with her. You said he went away — effaced himself. Since you told me that, I've always had a sort of idea that the house was — was a wife to him, stood to him for her — not as hers, though it was to be hers, but as she herself. I'm putting this so badly, but do you follow? He never married. He came home from India and bought it and made it what you have seen. There *is* something about it, isn't there? Mother felt it, I've always felt it. I think, from what you have said, that you feel it. A kind of air of — what shall I say? — dedication. I think things collected as he must have collected these, do acquire something that isn't in them in themselves. Are you following me or am I talking nonsense?"

"I don't think you're talking nonsense. I think I'm following."

"Well, then. Love has been stitched into many a shirt, hasn't it, and knitted into socks, and sewn on to a garment even with a button? Is it stretching the imagination too far to believe that the shirt or the socks or the garment might hold it, and that conceivably the wearer might almost . . . no, not almost . . ."

She broke off and looked at him, leaving the thought hanging, like a floating cobweb, for him to catch or not as he would.

"It is not stretching the imagination too far, or stretching it at all," he said.

"Then do you think Mother could gradually have come to know and been touched, and presently — if she was really like my good naughty Ellen, as you say, and accustomed to break hearts — have been smitten with a gentle, not too poignant remorse, and by degrees have come to give him — always, of course, without any real disloyalty to my father — what she had withheld from him in his lifetime?"

"I think it very likely. Indeed, it's just what she would have done. She had always a tender spot for the ones she turned down."

Jane looked radiant.

"It *was* that, then. There was something she said just before she died. I didn't under-

stand it at the time. I thought she was wandering. I haven't understood it till this moment."

She paused and Abel Tremlet waited.

"She had been half-unconscious, her eyes closed as if she was dozing. She opened them slowly and said, 'I shall tell him.' I said, 'Who, darling?' — and she gave a little laugh. 'Oh, you needn't be afraid, I shall tell them both.' I said 'Who, darling?' again. But by then she didn't know. Oh, doesn't it all fit, and doesn't it all somehow round up her life and old James's? And isn't it odd that I've never known till to-day? and" — she paused and continued — "odder still that I should never have known if I hadn't met you? and" — she paused again and finished — "oddest of all, that I should perhaps never have known even then, if I had not once chanced to talk to you about Ellen."

She had seemed, even to herself, to be pursuing the thought to see where it would lead her. It had led her to Ellen and the particular day when Ellen most specially had sung, 'Oh, isn't it a pity such a pretty girl as I . . .'

'No, I won't be a nun.' But, as with Alice and Father William, the words came differently to-day, and what she was humming to herself when they came to Dolgelly was not, 'No, I won't,' but somehow, somehow — and with a

rising of unjustifiable conviction — 'I *shan't!*' Dolgelly.

They got out of the car and walked about. On an impulse Jane bought picture postcards and, like any tripper of trippers disgorged from the char-à-bancs, wrote one there and then, directed, stamped, and posted it, to Dorothy. She wanted to share her happiness and knew that her thought would make Dorothy happy. Moreover, in her happiness, howsoever indirectly, Dorothy in some odd way was concerned.

CHAPTER XVI

ABERDOVEY.

They were on the homeward track now. Once more they disembarked. They walked along the tiny Promenade and looked at the sea. Aberystwith was there, to the left, across the Estuary. Then Jane said, "I want you to see the Happy Valley. Are you ready for a climb?"

Abel Tremlet professed himself ready for anything. They retraced their steps through the little town and turned their faces inland. A steepish climb. They rested occasionally to regain their breath. But it was the old man always who made the first move. He would turn suddenly and say 'Excelsior.' Jane, looking at his sturdiness, could really believe that the few short weeks that had elapsed since she had met him at the concert-hall in London had made him younger. He had seemed a very old man then.

When they were on the level he took her arm, but, even then, not for support. He was smiling with both eyes and lips, and she noted again the strong white sound teeth. With such bright quizzical eyes and such healthy young teeth he would never be old, but she

saw that he was proud of himself, and knew that she had a part in his pride. It was as if his achievement said, 'You see what I can do, not if *I* choose, but if *you* do.'

She gave the arm that was linked in hers an affectionate hug.

Thus, closely linked, they walked for a few hundred yards, and then, almost suddenly, the valley opened before them.

Instinctively they sat down to it, as you sit down to a feast. It was some moments before either spoke.

"What is it?" Jane said at last. "It isn't grandeur. There's nothing grand about it except in the sense in which Mrs. Williams uses the word — and then the word isn't grand: it's 'grahnd.' It isn't sublime or awful or even big, though we are seeing for miles and miles."

But she knew what it was. It was just what the little house itself had — the little smiling house.

"Do you know what I'm wishing?" Abel Tremlet said slowly.

"That you had had this to come to?"

"Just that, Jane. Just that — when my boy died. It might have done for me then what you — you, my dear, without it — have done for me since: taken some of the bitterness out of me. This was here when the guns were roaring in Flanders. Yes, this was here

when that poor tormented little wisp-of-nothing was dancing at her night-clubs. Oh, I'm not contradicting myself as much as I sound. I'm not contradicting myself at all. Little wisp-of-nothing she always was and she'll always be, but there was a time when I couldn't have seen that she herself was tormented, and somehow, now, and here, I do."

And this, though she did not take it up, except in so far as that she pressed his hand in token that she had heard it — was this also in the nature of a rounding-up and a rounding-off? Such a rounding-up and rounding-off as might precede the state of grace in which it is possible to say, '*Nunc dimittis*'?

They sat in silence again for a while, watching the changing lights on the hills, as Jane's mother, from her garden or her windows, had loved to watch them changing upon hers. Not for five minutes together were the lights quite the same. Little clouds, like balloons, and larger clouds, like floating islands, which later might mass themselves for rain, were in the blue of the sky, and the shadows of them would pass gently over bluish surfaces, turning blue to purple. Or, conversely, now it would be one hill or plateau that would be picked out for special gilding, now another. Change, change always, but always the same soothing, smiling peace.

"I came here three times during the War," Jane said. "In the early days when one was reading of the cathedrals; and again after a particularly awful day in 1915. I wanted to be told that it wasn't true — that it couldn't be true. And I came here the day we first heard of the possibility of the Armistice, when I wanted to be told that it *was*."

She had not meant to speak again of the War or of what might sadden her companion or — for him — even herself, and she was ready to regret her words as soon as they were spoken; but a glance at his face, which reflected the happy peace of the scene, reassured her.

"It answered you, I know."

"Yes, in its own way each time."

He nodded.

"It wouldn't say what it couldn't say, but it would say something — if only, 'Just look at me.'"

"That's what it did say," Jane said; and when they talked again it was of cheerful things.

A party of trippers, at some distance from where they were sitting, were disporting themselves upon the hillside, and their voices — cries and laughter — softened by the intervening space, came to them not unpleasantly upon the breeze. Though they played some game

of Chase Me, Chase Me — here, upon the everlasting hills! — they could not disturb the gently reigning harmony. Rather, Jane thought as she watched them, smiling unconsciously, rather did they seem to be part of it — woodland creatures? fauns? dryads? — the skimpy summer dresses of the girls helping — hamadryads? naiads? nymphs? A shepherd should have piped to them from a boulder, or even Pan himself. Goats, rampant, twined perhaps with garlands, have danced amongst them.

Abel Tremlet, though she had not spoken her thought, caught it.

"Poussin — Nicholas?"

She nodded.

"A Bacchanal. There should be vine-leaves instead of the girls' headache bands — or at least the leaves of hops. Probably all that is doing is being done on what the little shops call 'Minerals.' Dreadful bubbly lemonade — a marble rattling in the empty bottle! Dreadful aerated ginger-ale, screw-stoppered, — not even the pop of a cork! I'd rather think it was beer, wouldn't you, for the sake of the hops, or cider — though there would be some difficulty, perhaps, in twining the leaves of apple. But somehow they are right as they are, and, somehower still, Catch-me-and-kiss-me, or whatever it is they are playing — is it Kiss-in-the-Ring, do you think, without a

Ring? — *is* right, *is* in keeping with the landscape. Centaurs here once interrupted such games and carried off girls who didn't look so very different from these."

"*Aren't* you a Romantic!"

"Well, aren't you?"

"I? If I listen to you much longer, and above all if I look at you — Jane, you may say what you like, but you have got the prettiest feet I ever saw, and why you haven't been carried off yourself for them, long ago, only you know and you won't tell me! — I shall find, or you will, which will be worse, that your old cousin is himself an elderly satyr!"

Brighton. The Pier. A sky as blue as this sky. Little white clouds in it. Gulls gliding, hovering, dipping suddenly to rise again, with a cry, on spread wings. A newspaper flapping. Jane was far away.

A cow, ready before her time, perhaps, for the milking, lowed somewhere down in the valley.

"I should have liked to wait for the sunset," Jane said, "but if we're to call at Plas Llwyn . . ."

She broke off.

"Why shouldn't we?"

"And give up Plas Llwyn?"

She nodded.

"The sunsets are wonderful here, and I believe there will be a super-sunset this evening. Shall we? I'll go down into the town and find Anson and tell him to bring us some tea."

They deliberated. The proposal was very tempting. But Abel Tremlet seemed doubtful.

"Shall we toss for it?" Jane said. "Heads, Plas Llwyn; tails, tea and sunset."

"We'll toss for it."

He fumbled in his pocket and produced a shilling.

The coin spun in the air, fell, struck a little bit of rock, glanced off it, and settled, almost upright, in a tuft of grass. An obvious miss-toss. Still, there was just a semblance of justification for Jane, who now wanted to stay and cried, "Tails: Tea and Sunset."

But, even so, it was impossible to be quite sure, for, in leaning forward, one of them had touched the grass, and, though indisputably 'tails' was slightly uppermost, it was possible that the movement of the blades had given the coin a bias one way or the other.

"No, I'm not satisfied," Abel Tremlet said. "We'll have it again."

"I believe you want to go to Plas Llwyn."

He did not answer.

Instead, he winked at her and spun the coin once more.

Incredibly the same thing happened, or as

nearly the same thing as might be. If anything, 'heads' was indicated.

They looked at each other.

"Now what are we to do? The gods clearly won't take any responsibility."

"You can't toss for nuts," Jane said. "That's what's clear. Give the King's shilling to me."

He held it out, withdrew it, teasing her; held it out again and again withdrew it. At the third holding-out, she made a grab at it and secured it. She laughed, spun it, caught it neatly on the flat of one palm, and covered it at once with the other.

"Which do you say it is?"

But now, and even as she laughed, the game had taken to itself a quality which Jane, conscious of it suddenly and against her will, could only have defined as a sort of momentousness. And, more than that, something like this had happened to her before!

Something, somewhere, lately. Words came into her mind. The word 'lightly'; the word 'fear'; or was it 'terror'? Some analogy, was it, which she had had occasion to perceive between whatever it was that she had been doing at the time and a game, like this, of chance?

Faces, faces . .

The days of what she had chosen to call her street-walking, when, longing to find the face

she sought, she had shrunk from turning a corner for very fear that she should find it.

She remembered.

"Which do you say it is?" she asked again.

But why was she protracting the issue?

She held her hands towards him, the coin still concealed.

Why, when every moment that she dallied added to that sense of fatality which was subtly changing what had been a mere game into something which was not like a game at all?

"Heads," he answered; "which do you?"

It was perhaps as a protest against the seriousness which seemed to have crept into what had not been, and must not be allowed to be, serious, and as a deliberate attempt, therefore, to recapture and reëstablish the spirit of jesting in which the thing had begun, that she looked at him from under mischievous eyelids and said, "Tails, or — who knows? — *heads!*"

Simultaneously they turned theirs; Jane hers over her shoulder without moving her outstretched hands. Something was happening down there where the trippers were disporting themselves on the grass. A series of little breathless laughing shrieks, to an accompaniment of other cries and laughter, had come to them on the shining air. They came

from one particular maiden running like the wind, dodging, circling, feinting, darting, hard-pressed by her pursuant swain. So keen was the chase, so persistent the eluding, that the rest with one consent had stopped in their gambolling to watch. Gathered into little separate but shifting groups of surprising beauty, they shouted their comments, their advices, their encouragements. These, perhaps, as the flight and chase dodged amongst them, continually dispersed and re-formed. Botticelli? The Fire-Bird? — if Jane had seen it. Nothing more unlike, perhaps, if you had been near, but at this distance . . . three girls thrown together for a moment, their skimpy jumpers showing their limbs to help the illusion, or three girls huddled, for another as fleeting, cowering as the chase skirted them, or momentarily looped. Botticelli?

"Run!" Jane said. "Run!"

She and the very moment itself were breathless as the flying girl.

Once more the girl had escaped.

"Run, oh, run!"

Yet Jane wanted to see her caught.

"*Run!*"

A sudden side-slip. The girl was down. Strephon in a twinkling was upon her, claiming his prize. But he had to fight for it. Jane could imagine, though she could not see, the

flushed, laughing, averted face under the elbow which strove to cover it. Why did she fight? She had taken up the challenge. She had run from this particular Strephon because she wanted to be kissed. But she would not have been woman, Jane knew, if, wanting to be kissed, she had not fought.

Figures had intervened between the two watchers and the struggling pair.

A shout went up. The kiss, Jane knew, had been taken and received.

Her eyes fell upon her hands, which, clasping the coin flatly between them, were still extended.

"Take one of my postcards," she said to Abel, without moving. "Have you a pencil and a stamp? Then stamp the card and address it to me. Yes, to Aberllwyn, of course."

He obeyed her.

"Put it and your pencil between the tips of my fingers, so that I can carry them."

He obeyed her again.

She did not say what she was going to do, and he did not ask her. She rose to her knees and then to her feet, and walked over in the direction of the players. They were beginning to play again, but the pair who had played so strenuously and whom all had stopped to watch, tired, it was probable, and out of breath, had detached themselves from the

others and were to be seen resting on the grass, and, it is to be supposed, on their joint laurels. These two Jane approached. He saw her speak to them, and presently bend over them, holding out her hands. He saw their heads come close together over her hands, and he thought he saw that, as theirs came together, she turned hers away. Then he fancied she threw something into the air, for there followed some sort of laughing scramble in which others of the party, drawn now more towards them by curiosity, joined in. To this scramble Jane waved a comprehensive adieu, and then he saw her coming back to him.

He waited for her to speak.

"Now for Plas Llwyn," she said.

She laughed into his eyes.

"Did the coin say Plas Llwyn?"

"We're going to Plas Llwyn, I tell you."

"But did the coin . . .?"

"We shan't know till I get my postcard tomorrow."

"Well, of all the mad . . .!"

"That's what I think, too," Jane said.

"Upon my word!" He rose to his feet. "Upon my sacred word! What are you, Jane Weston? Are you qualifying for a lunatic asylum? Have I come out with a young woman who has taken leave of her senses, or with a madcap of sixteen who hasn't yet attained to any?"

Jane wagged her head at him.

"I don't know either," she said.

"Then we're in perfect agreement. She doesn't know. *They* know, all right, over there. Look at them. They think we're both mad. Me, too, if you please! Do you realise that I'm a respectable householder? That I live in South Eaton Place — blameless, matter-of-fact South Eaton Place? That I'm a rate-payer and have a vote? What did you tell them?"

"The exact truth. That we'd tossed about something and had changed our minds about abiding by the result. That I, nevertheless, had a fancy to know, after the event, what the result had actually been."

He began to laugh. He laughed most of the way down into Aberdovey. He paused as he came in sight of the car, and faced her.

"But do you know what you have done? You've involved us all in a sort of responsibility — even Miss Rod, even benevolent, overflowing Miss Rod. You've somehow made our visit to Plas Llwyn momentous."

Momentous. Her own word!

Yes, Jane knew that; but it was questionable whether the circumstances, generally, of the strange day itself had not done that already.

CHAPTER XVII

NOTHING, however, in point of fact, could have seemed less momentous than the visit.

"This," Jane said, by the way, as they came in sight of the lodge gates — "this is where Miss Rod and Mrs. Vaughan Rees began to change their gloves."

A lodge-keeper opened to them — handsome old wrought-iron gates between stone posts bearing the arms of the Barmouths. Jane had forgotten something of the beauty of the park, and, as the car moved smoothly along the broad well-kept road, she wondered again with Miss Rod how Lord Barmouth had ever brought himself to the point of parting with his property. Miss Rod, she remembered, laid the 'blame' upon Lady Barmouth, who wore such very short skirts for a woman of her age and had always found the place too remote for her. Well, Plas Llwyn was perhaps, as she had said, at the back of Godspeed; but what, in these days — the days of motors — did that matter? The remoteness, moreover, appealed to Jane, who would, she thought, if she had owned the place, have felt but an increased satisfaction in the sense of its comparative isolation. She did not wish her

own little house a mile nearer London. She would keep it, she thought, if the whole circumstances of her life ever changed. Yet the Barmouths, who had their roots in the soil here, as she herself had not at Aberllwyn, had sold their inheritance.

These thoughts, as her eyes wandered over the spreading park, even before the house itself came into view. So gracious a landscape was that which had been netted from the surrounding hills and tamed, as it were, without hurt to its natural wildness. It was 'timbered,' as the estate agents say, with fine trees — oak for the most part; Montgomeryshire famous for its oaks. Some of these were of surprising size. One, some twenty yards from the drive, upon which they came from a sudden dip which had obscured it, called forth an exclamation from Abel Tremlet.

"The girth of it!" he said.

"Yes, that must be the one," Jane said, searching in her memory. "There's some tradition attached to it. It is supposed to have been planted by Owen Somebody in the year sonething. We must ask Mrs. Mount-Ross. We'll stop and look at it as we come back. Cyveiliog? Some name like that. Was there an Owen Cyveiliog?"

Abel Tremlet did not know. His Welsh history, he said, had been neglected.

"Well, someone we both ought to know about. Ah, there are the deer."

The herd, surprised at a bend in the road, trotted leisurely to safety and went on with its browsing.

"Aren't they darlings? Lady Barmouth had a pet fawn that used to follow her about like a dog. Now you see the house."

Red sandstone, like Powis Castle. In the abounding sunshine of the afternoon the old crooked building, with its single tower, a little out of the perpendicular, its mullioned windows, all a little askew, and its stacks of leaning, twisted chimneys, had a beauty that touched your heart. How could Lord Barmouth? How even Lady Barmouth, hankering though she might be after the home counties where she could have her week-end parties, and the come-and-go generally of social activities that here was impossible? Her skirts, Jane thought, must truly have been too short for a woman of her age.

A minute or two later the car had stopped, and Anson was ringing the bell.

Mrs. Mount-Ross was at home.

They were shown across a stone hall, in which packing-cases were still in evidence, into a large room with a painted ceiling.

The butler withdrew to find his mistress, and for some minutes they were left to themselves. They looked round.

"I begin to agree with Miss Rod," Abel Tremlet said. "I feel I shouldn't have liked Lady Barmouth."

"I've been agreeing with her since we turned into the park," Jane said. "You would have liked her — Lady Barmouth — all the same," she added. "She knew she was trashy, but she was Someone in the old sense — your sense when you lash out about the present day. She had a Puckish humour that would have beguiled you."

"Yes, she did tell Miss Rod that story. I mustn't forget that to her. Well, well, we must hope the Mount-Rosses are worthy of what she rejected."

They were to see.

Mrs. Mount-Ross came in, pulling off a pair of gardening gloves. She was a stout middle-aged woman with hair of three shades, a soft Irish voice, and an engaging smile. She dangled a hat — which she had evidently taken off as she came — by its elastic band, and threw it on to a chair as she crossed the room.

"This is really nice of you, Miss Weston. I had heard of you, I needn't tell you, from Lady Barmouth, and I was hoping you would call on me. I hope I haven't kept you very long. They had a great hunt for me — I was down below in the garden — so I just came in as I

am and you'll have to excuse me untidiness."

So much for Miss Rod and the visit of ceremony!

Jane presented Mr. Tremlet. Mrs. Mount-Ross's look tightened upon him as she heard his name.

Any relation, she asked eagerly, of the Tremlets of Bignalstown, neighbours of their own in County Waterford?

The Tremlets of Bignalstown were, as it happened, a distant branch of Abel Tremlet's family — which, a couple of generations back, had migrated to Ireland — and also, incidentally, though more distantly, of Jane's. Neither he nor Jane had met them. But it had become plain, from Mrs. Mount-Ross's face even before she spoke, that the connection, slight as it might be, had some very special interest and significance for her.

"I don't know," she said, "if you and Miss Weston know of our misfortune — the misfortune, in our most unhappy country, which resulted in bringing us here?"

Jane knew. The burning-down of their home.

Bignalstown, in that tragic emergency, had opened its doors and its arms to them.

"Our servants — all of us. Took us in, in that terrible time, and kept us for three mortal months till we were able to come here. I shall

never forget their kindness. Now isn't it delightful that amongst my very first visitors I should be welcoming even their distant connections?"

So the ice — if there had been any to break — would have been effectually broken, and five minutes had not passed before Jane felt as if she had known her all her life.

"Mercifully," Mrs. Mount-Ross said, "no lives were lost. But we saved little more than what we stood up in. Well, we won't talk of it. And wasn't it the luck of the world, Miss Weston, that we should be able to step straight, as one may say, into this?"

"You like it," Jane said, speaking not so much for Plas Llwyn as for the country of her adoption, yet indicating Plas Llwyn as covering both. "I feel you like it."

She looked from Mrs. Mount-Ross to her cousin. She had remembered Lady Barmouth, and decided that she meant Plas Llwyn.

"Ah, who would not? We knew it, you see. We had stayed here years ago, and fallen in love with it then. It was late in one's life to make changes and so great a change, but when Lord Barmouth, out of the blue of the skies, wrote and offered first to lend it to us, and then, amost incredibly, to part with it altogether, it seemed too good to be true — the utterly unexpected solution of all our diffi-

culties. I wonder now whether, in the history of properties, was anything ever settled so quickly or so happily before?"

But Mrs. Mount-Ross, with her soft Irish voice and her hair of three shades, was more, Jane had decided, than 'worthy,' and, when she added, "Sure I thank God every night on me knees," Jane felt that she loved her.

Tea made its appearance and, in the wake of it, Colonel Mount-Ross, a big, loose-limbed man, in a homespun suit, with nether garments of a fashion known now as 'plus-fours,' but, to Abel Tremlet at least, as the knickerbockers still of his unforgotten youth. Colonel Mount-Ross, introduced to his visitors, greeted them with the same frank cordiality as had characterised the welcome extended to them by his wife. Tremlet, it was plain, a name to conjure with in that household.

Over the teacups, when Jane incidentally made her first bow to a soda cake and an Irish barm-brack, the acquaintance, begun so auspiciously, ripened quickly.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Mount-Ross said, "that me young people are out. They are picnicking somewhere on the hills, and goodness knows when they'll be back."

But Jane was feeling no need of young people.

Presently the four were making a tour of

the house, and Jane, delighted with what she saw, was reminded of her and her mother's first little tour of inspection of their own. The pleasure and pride of Colonel and Mrs. Mount-Ross in their new possession were so unconcealed and, withal, so modest, and their appreciation of its traditions so genuine, that not the ghost of old Lord Barmouth himself, or the ghosts of any of his ancestors, could have resented their presence or regarded them as intruders. The house itself, Jane felt, had accepted them.

"And if anything," Mrs. Mount-Ross said, "could have helped to make up to us for Mount-Ross, where we'd lived all our lives and our children were born, wouldn't it have been just this? When I die, Mount-Ross sure enough will be found on me heart, but I tell me husband, if he looks very carefully, he'll maybe find, by that time, another name just beginning to twine with the letters."

They saw the dairies, the stables, the gardens.

An hour and a half had passed unbelievably quickly when Jane asked for the car. Even then, last words took many minutes.

"That," Abel Tremlet said, as he settled back in his seat — "that was as pleasant a visit as I have ever paid in my life. Now, Jane

Weston, aren't you glad that I made you come?"

"Very," Jane said; "very glad. But did you make me?"

"Most certainly I made you."

"Well, we shall know to-morrow morning when I get my postcard."

Only then did it occur to her that, wholly delightful as the visit had proved, nothing had happened.

And what had she expected would happen?

Momentous. Where had been the momentousness?

Still, she was glowing, and Mrs. Mount-Ross filled her mind. The Irish voice, the little Irish inflections and turns of speech, the warm Irish geniality, the complete absence of any bitterness, even when she had spoken of the burning of Mount-Ross — 'our unhappy country' she had said — the very elastic to her hat, and the three separate shades of the hair which had once been all that shining auburn of the thick young plait which crowned her head so regally and incongruously; these combined to make up something which was as grateful as a pleasing gift, or as grateful and comforting as the Cocoa of Someone's advertisement.

"And the Tremlets of Bignalstown," she said aloud, "our forgotten relations."

"You see?" said her cousin. "You owe even your welcome to me. If my name hadn't been Tremlet . . ."

"She would equally have taken me — you too, perhaps, I grant you that, but under my wing, if you please! — to her large heart. She made one feel, and believe, that one was as nice as she is herself."

"The conceit of Jane Weston!"

They were nearing the oak. The deer were gathered round it now, and moved off again as they approached.

"Oh," Jane said, "we forgot to ask about Owen Cyveiliog, or whoever it was. But we must stop and look at his tree."

She called to Anson and they alighted. They made their way towards it, the deer watching. One little hind advanced a step or two on slender legs, sniffing inquisitively.

Momentous? The tree was that — a veritable giant, bigger even in its bigness than they had supposed. Iron bands girdled it, supporting its vast trunk. One branch was propped. Memories of childish readings came to Jane. An oak and deer. Harrison Ainsworth! "Windsor Castle." Herne the Hunter. There had been a picture of Herne the Hunter with the antlers of a stag branching from his head.

"We ought to have remembered to ask.

But what does it matter? Owen Cyveiliog or not, someone quite as long ago — whenever he lived!"

"If either of us knew anything of forestry, or you, my dear, knew anything of Welsh history, we might hazard a guess. As it is, as you wisely say, what does it matter?"

It was of a novel, too, but of another novel, that the great hollow trunk reminded him.

"'Lost Sir Massingberd,'" he said. "I wonder whether you young ones ever read James Payn now. Or is Thomas Hardy, as the living link between my time and yours, as far back as any of you will condescend to go?"

"I'm not as young as that," Jane said, smiling. "I'll go back any distance you like. I haven't, as a matter of fact, read James Payn. What happened to lost Sir Massingberd?"

"He disappeared. He was found — I forget — was it after years of search for him? — in the hollow trunk of just such an old tree as this. I remember the thrill of the finding — though I'm not certain now that I could risk submitting that particular novel to the sophisticated criticism of even your generation. I can only say for myself that, though I wasn't very young when it came out, I did get the thrill."

And thus it came that, indirectly of the tree as they stood before it and under it, but also

very directly, indeed, they found themselves talking of the novelists of his day, most of whom had died in it: Thackeray, who would never be buried; Dickens, who would never even be dead; Trollope, dead but showing signs even of resurrection; George Meredith, inconceivably overlooked for a time; and so again to Thomas Hardy of his day and of her own, living and to live. Jane was far away.

"I wonder," she heard him saying, "whether you share my delight in one book of his which, for some reason, is not in the minds of even his greatest admirers when they speak of his novels?"

Jane's heart bounded.

"'Two on a . . .'"

"'Tower.'"

The word leapt from her.

"Yes! 'Two on a Tower.'"

She looked at him and back at the tree, but it is doubtful whether for a moment she was conscious of anything but the Pier at Brighton, and that this was the second vision she had had of it since she had opened her eyes that morning.

"Two on a Tower." Two anywhere. On a pier, for instance, isolated, though crowds surged about them. In a London restaurant across the tables and the intervening heads — though one of them only should perceive! On

a river, revealed to each other — no, again only one revealed to the other! — in the sudden brief flashlight of the shower of stars from a rocket. Two on a tower, or anywhere else. But Two, the magic number, the only number in the numerals of Love.

She was talking of the book, listening, agreeing, and watching now the slow progress of a little beetle which seemed to have formed the laborious project of making the circuit of one of the iron bands which girdled the tree. Would it, indeed, make the circuit — get all the way round? Sometimes it slipped and recovered itself. Sometimes it stopped, feeling the surface with its antennæ. When, long after they should have gone, it came round again to where it had been when she had first seen it, would it still proceed?

What happened then presented itself to her through the confusion of her thoughts. Several things, indeed, as if to pull her mind in different directions, seemed to happen simultaneously. The beetle had stopped, raised the hard little cases of its wings, tentatively, as it were, experimentally — allowing a momentary glimpse of the wings themselves — before refolding them trailingly under the covering lids. Almost immediately it went again through the same mechanical processes; paused with the lids outspread; flew away. She thought she

had lost it. She had not lost it. Two little beetles, one following the other, were upon another of the iron bands. Abel Tremlet was turning back towards the car. Anson, perceiving his movement, had alighted to start the engine, which he had stopped as his employers lingered by the tree. The little hind, separated by her inquisitiveness from the herd, suddenly whisked back to it. But it was not Abel's movement which had startled her. The herd itself was at sudden attention.

Jane, in a dream, followed her cousin to the car. Not till she had reached it, and had her foot on the step, did she realise why the herd, with a whisk like that of the hind, was trotting away. From above the dip in the drive came the sound of voices and laughter. The faces of two girls appeared on the rising ground above her and were withdrawn. Mrs. Mount-Ross's young people returning from their picnic. If Jane, her foot on the step, had not herself been startled as well as confused, she would have introduced herself, but her wits were wandering; moreover, it was the next moment that her wits deserted her altogether.

Another face and three quarters of a body had appeared on the ridge above her. There was a breathless pause, which seemed an age, during which she had met two eyes and seen them stray from her own to her foot on the

step and back then to her eyes, recognition not so much dawning in them as leaping to them.

Afterwards she could only suppose that she had got into the car — on winged feet, perhaps. She heard the door slam. She could only suppose that she had slammed it. The car was moving, gaining speed.

Abel Tremlet was looking at her.

"Don't speak to me!" she managed to say, her cheeks burning, her eyes shining. "As you love me, don't look at me or speak to me!"

At the lodge gate she started up in her seat.

"Stop him! I must go back! I must go back! *No*, don't stop him! I can't go back! Of course I can't go back! I don't know one bit what I'm saying." She looked at him and laughed. "I want to get home. Oh, Abel dearest, I want to get home and shut myself up."

They got home . . . Jane knew not how.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUT she did not shut herself up till she had got through dinner and as much of the evening as would suffice for the saving of appearances. Not for the saving of them in Abel's eyes. She knew him too well and loved him too dearly to care what he thought. In a sense the same argument would have held good with regard to her faithful Ellen. She could almost, indeed, have confided in Ellen. But she did not want even Ellen's eyes upon her just then, nor solicitous talk in the house, and she did not wish to be supposed to be ill. Well, she would not have been Jane if she had not been able to count upon her ability to get through two hours. In her bedroom — she knew *that!* — when the door should finally have closed upon her, she was going to 'have it out,' once and for all, with herself and Betty. Oh, she knew *that!* Time enough, though. She could wait.

And Abel helped her. How much and how tactfully he helped her, talking himself or not talking. She helped him to help her. And this, though while at one moment she was in riotous spirits, the next she was sick with apprehension and despair. She was the happiest

woman in the world. She was the most miserable.

It was Abel who made the move.

"I'm going to bed," he said. "A long day in the open air —"

"A long day with a mad woman."

"Well, that, too. Anyway, I'm for bed."

"I'm ready," she said.

She received his good-night kiss and was able to resist the temptation to throw her arms hysterically round his neck and abandon herself to the ecstasy of the comfort that would have been there for her in his understanding arms. He made no sign. Only, at the turn in the stairs, as she waited at the foot of them to go back and put out the lights, he paused for one moment and said, "The Happy Valley is where it was and has been this million years, and it is the Happy Valley, remember."

"I should just think it was!" she answered him.

She went back to the drawing-room, exulting. She reached her room, exulting.

Goodness, how happy she was! What a wonderful, wonderful thing this was which had happened to her! How was it conceivable that, even for brief intervals, she could have been anything else? There was still Betty, of course; but she was ready for Betty. So ready for Betty that she could sit down,

stretch herself at ease in her deep armchair to savour her happiness. She was numb with very happiness.

The double miracle had happened. After twelve years she had found him, and after twelve years he had recognised her. Double? The miracle was triple: that he should have remembered her at all! Yes, and there was more than remembrance in his recognition. At some point, probably only at once, he had been looking for her. Probably only at once — in the first few surprised minutes after she had slipped from him and hidden herself in the crowd. Perhaps in the next few days? Perhaps for the rest of his own sojourn in Brighton. But perhaps, oh, perhaps, from time to time afterwards? In other crowds? At moments when memories stirred in him? Was it possible that sometimes, sometimes, in the course of the years he had remembered her as a girl he had once met and who had seemed . . . oh, was *that* possible?

And at Henley when she had touched him and virtue had gone out of her — her own virtue? would she greatly have cared? — perhaps afterwards — retrospectively — he had recognised her then? And even sought her in the darkness? Between the darknesses, as the light of the fireworks dispelled them—in the intervals between one darkness and another?

If she could think that!

And she did think that. For, of a certainty, in the interval between the far-off Brighton of so many yesterdays, and the encounter a few short hours ago at Plas Llwyn — the darknesses between the lights — something must have occurred to account for what she had seen; for the look of astonishment great as her own, the straying of his eyes to her feet where the confirmation they met was instant, irrefutable, indisputable . . . for the leap — oh, the leap! — to complete and unmistakable knowledge. He had known her at Henley — though subsequently to his glimpse of her and the touch of her hand on his hand — and had again lost her, to find her to-day as she him.

If that was so, and it was, then Betty was negligible.

The clock on the mantelpiece between the two Rockingham vases struck ten. She counted the strokes, through the warm glow of triumphant happiness that lapped her round like a blanket. What was it to her if he was entangled? She could afford to relax herself further to the warm softness of the chair. What to her if he had asked Betty to marry him? Betty was nothing — a ninepin that you might set up only to knock down.

She set Betty up now that she might proceed to knock her down. The moment had come.

"Hands off, Betty, this man is mine."

But, to her surprise! . . . Betty's slow smile.

"He was mine before he was yours — before ever you saw him. He never was yours."

Betty's silent smile that did not falter. Why did it not falter?

All men were Betty's? Would she dare to say that?

Silence. The smile persisting.

Femme fatale? Would she dare, even if her experiences had proved it true? Or was she so strong in her knowledge, her case so impregnable, that she had no need of words, no need of anything but this baffling, this impenetrable, unruffled smile.

"Stop that!" Jane said. "Stop that, if you don't want me to hit you."

But she might have been the clergyman, that figure of fun, in "The Private Secretary" of goodness knows how many years ago, bleating his 'have to be very cross with you'; and she knew it. Wasn't there something even about a 'good hard knock' to reduce such a threatened threat to its deserved, its asked-for absurdity? And Betty, upon her part, had now but to plunge it into yet deeper absurdity by exhorting her in the time-honoured words of a thousand absurd novels to 'Let them at least remember' — or endeavour to remember —

'that they were Ladies' — which one of them seemed in grave 'Danger of Forgetting.'

Jane, in key, bit her lip — though, perhaps, not till the blood came. She was managing her imagined scene badly.

She laughed and faced Betty anew. She was not, all the same, going to have any tom-foolery — her scene, to please Betty, on any ladylike footing. The emotions of the moment were too primitive for that. Two women were fighting for a man. Two women, in the skins of the Stone Age, if you like — or before that, before the first flint was chipped, in their own skins and little else — a girdle of leaves maybe, maybe not even that — fighting, with clubs or the thigh-bones of some animal, for the man, in his coat of natural hair, who had chosen them both, perhaps, but dallied between them.

"I'm here" (she had transported herself in thought to Betty's abominable room, for she could not have her in her own) — "I'm here to give you fair warning," she said, "that I've neither scruple nor shame, and that if he wants me I'm his, as I have been from the first moment I saw him. I'd take him from you if that were necessary, but it isn't, for he's mine now, and I tell you again that he never was yours. After all, I see, it's not a warning that I'm giving you. It's just a statement that I'm making."

"You seem very sure of him."

"Oh, I'm sure enough now."

"And what, may I ask, are you going to do?"

"Nothing!"

"Oh, nothing?"

"I shall have nothing to do."

"Just fall into his arms? — as I have done before you."

Betty had her there. If Jane wanted shamelessness for shamelessness, she was to have it.

"He will forget. I shall be able to make him forget."

But she had winced, and Betty had seen her wince. For a moment she felt physically sick. Her eyes, gathered from Betty, like skirts that must not touch a leper, wandered round Betty's horrible room and came to rest upon the grinning face of the monster masking the telephone. Not there could they rest. They fell next upon the welter of cushions on the day-bed. Not there! Where in this abominable room could they shelter?

"Oh, you seem very sure," Betty was saying again with her quiet smile.

"If what you say is true," Jane said, "do you think he doesn't know you? Do you think he hasn't summed you up and classed you?"

"And asked me to marry him."

"If he's really spoken of marriage . . . Do men marry their women?"

"You admit I'm his woman. I thought *you* claimed to be that."

The blood mounted to Jane's cheeks, to her eyelids, to her forehead. Not for Betty's words, but for her own. She had said that she was without shame, but there were limits, it appeared, to what she could inflict and endure even in the shamelessness she had offered and demanded.

"A word, the same word," she said, nevertheless, when she could control herself sufficiently to speak at all, "has more than one meaning and application."

But she was getting the worst of it. The ninepin she had set up showed no signs of toppling. She had not so much as shaken it.

"I've never yet lost a lover," Betty said. "I've turned down one or two. Never lost one. When I'm old I shall have many friends, many very dear friends, who have been my lovers."

She spoke so gently that Jane could believe what she said to be true.

"And I can turn a friend back into a lover."

"You won't succeed in doing that with this one. You'll find you've lost this one all right. You see, Betty, I know. After to-day he will never look back."

"After to-day?"

"Yes, after to-day."

Betty considered.

"I don't know, of course, what may have happened to-day. I know what has happened on many yesterdays."

"That may be. That was before to-day."

"The Ides of March. I must beware, indeed. A strange day to-day."

"The strangest in *my* life," Jane said.

Yes, the strangest in her whole life — stranger than that day twelve years ago which had brought the first 'strangeness' into it; stranger than that which had seen her rebirth and the deliberate planning of her odyssey, than all the intervening strangenesses which had studded that like points of light guiding her unfalteringly to Plas Llwyn and Peter.

Unthinkingly she spoke his name.

"Others maybe," she said, reverting to what Betty had said a moment or two earlier. "Others. Not Peter."

"Peter?"

"Yes?"

"But 'Peter'? Do *you* call him that?"

"Why not?"

Betty laughed softly.

"Only that I had thought that was my name for him."

Jane, inventing though she was — if, indeed, she was inventing? — was taken aback! Words, the words she was putting into Betty's mouth and into her own, failed her.

Betty filled the pause meanwhile with her soft delightful laughter. She seemed genuinely amused. Jane, baffled, brought to a full stop, listened for what she would say next, for what she would find to say, rather as it seemed to her, than for what she herself would find for her to say. Betty, not she, appeared to be directing the conduct of the scene generally. It was all somehow rather frightening. But at least, then, it must be evident that she was being fair to Betty since she was allowing her so freely to score off her, even to nonplus her.

"So he hands on my name for him to you and you adopt it. Jane, this is really funny. Did he tell you Peter was my name for him, or did he keep that back from you? Did he tell you how I first came to call him Peter? And when, and how, and where? Over there, if you care to know, amongst the cushions. Perhaps he's not such a rock, after all, as I supposed him. You may be able to tell me."

But Jane was silent. What she could not tell Betty was that 'Peter' was the only name she knew him by, and that she had come even by this only through the innocent prattlings of Betty's little son.

And that in itself was ugly. Everything seemed to be ugly, though Betty's physical beauty persisted.

It was she, moreover, who must beware. If Betty should discover that she did not know his name, that 'Peter' comprehended all that she knew of names for him! A stranger speaks to you, and on the Pier at Brighton, and, knowing nothing of him, you . . . Goodness! if Betty should discover that!

"Oh, you picked him up? At Brighton?"

If it should come about that Betty should be in a position to say this! There were apparent uglinesses in the very sanctities of her love. Actually — oh, she knew, she knew that there were none; that all was sheer beauty. Two in the wide world meet (thus and thus only she thought of their meeting) who have been intended for each other since the beginning of time. Maeterlinck. "The Blue Bird." They recognise each other even then. Let her but tell Betty that, however, and hear Betty's laughter . . .

But, though Betty should laugh, it was true.

"It is as Peter that I think of him," she said, rallying. "To myself. Only to myself. To his face I never called him Peter. Do you think, by the way, that it would take you, and you alone, to perceive the Peter in him — the stone, the rock on which one could build? Not that, if I were you, Betty, I should attempt building. I should stick to my decorating —

to my black marble bathrooms and their looking-glasses in which to see myself as I am; to my orange boudoirs and my cushions and monsters, my *baroque* — if that's the word — my *baroque* bedrooms. I should let building be."

Betty did not reply at once. She seemed to be turning over what she had heard and examining it.

"Some trifling confusion of thought, isn't there?" she murmured at length. "Building? Decorating? I see the connection, of course, but not quite, I think, in this case, the application — your word, Jane. However, I gather generally, I think, that I mustn't count upon Peter, and incidentally, perhaps, that you don't like my house."

"Oh, your house was all right till you laid hands on it."

"And Peter so far is 'all right'? I'm not to lay hands upon him?"

Jane did not answer.

"But if I have, and if, furthermore, he has laid hands, as you call it, on me? I thought I had told you."

"And I thought *I* had told *you* . . ."

"What had you told me?"

"That he'd forget. That I could make him forget."

But she shut her eyes, for she knew what was coming.

It came.

"And you? Do you think you'll forget? Do you think you'll ever forget?"

Mercilessly, pitilessly, remorselessly, Betty was rubbing it in.

"Strong as you are, do you think you'll have strength for that? Shall I tell you what will happen? If you get him — and you may, for I don't deny that he's sore with me now for, well, for keeping him waiting — do you think that you'll know once to your dying day or to his, that you've got him at all? Do you think that, out of your sight or in your sight, yes, *in* your sight, in your very arms if you like, he'll be yours even partially? Will you ever be sure? You'll know, remember, that he came to you on the rebound from me. It's take me or leave me, with his sort, and if I've lost him — though I don't admit that, I may tell you, or, anyway, admit that yet! — it's because I've played fast and loose with him. There used to be a little song — from the pantomimes of your day probably. It was called 'Dear Lady Disdain.' 'She wouldn't say yes and she wouldn't say no; so what could the poor little man do but go?' Very well, then. If he's gone, it's because I've let him go. If he's gone, I've sent him. Lent him. Yes, only lent him. If Lady Disdain — *this* Lady Disdain, anyway — wants him back, she has

only to whistle, and if she wants him back even after you think you've got him, she'll still only have to whistle. She speaks from experience."

So it was Betty, not she, who was warning. Where was the ninepin now? Where the hard wooden ball with which Jane had thought to overthrow her? Jane looked at her hand. It was empty.

And then Betty changed. For the relentless Betty she had challenged, the Betty against whom, in the pride of her exultation, she had dared to pit herself, there stood, bending a little with arms outstretched, like the figure of many Madonnas in the candlelit dimnesses of old French or Italian churches, a different Betty altogether, the gentle disarming Betty of Lansdowne Passage and the confidences — amid even the abominations of the horrible room in Charles Street — the Betty who, in her confessions, had cried, 'Do you think I didn't love Geoffrey?' — the Betty who somehow was aways faintly perceptible under the vilenesses of the seven devils which possessed and tormented her.

This Betty said, "Jane, did you think I'd do that? Did you think if I could — and I couldn't! — I would? Take him. He never was mine."

What did she mean? But she had said it.

Contradicting herself and all that had gone before, she had said it. 'I couldn't,' and, 'He never was mine.' Never hers? She had said it.

Jane started to her feet with a cry. She wanted to throw herself at Betty's and clasp them.

But where was Betty? Betty was gone. The day-bed with the cushions was gone. The orange walls. The grinning monster. She was in her own room. Safe in her own room with the gentle faded hangings and the friendly mellow furniture. And the clock was ticking quietly on the mantelpiece between the two Rockingham vases. And the hands marked the hour.

Two minutes — could she believe her eyes? — two minutes past ten!

Away under the stars lay the Happy Valley. Deep calm shadows and starlight. The grasses would rustle; a bird wake and call, and fall again into sleep; a cow low, perhaps, once; or at long, long intervals. The Happy Valley was there. Always there.

CHAPTER XIX

THE morning brought her postcard; and her postcard said *Tails*.

Tails? Tea and sunset.

She screwed her eyes.

Not 'heads' for Plas Llwyn? Not 'heads' even now? Was it possible? After all that had happened, not 'heads'?

A setback.

The gods, it was clear, were determined obstinately to hold aloof, eschewing responsibility.

Or just chuckling in their sleeves?

Why, of course, chuckling in their sleeves!

Chuckling in their sleeves, Jane decided, and, waiting only till the door had closed upon Ellen, she joined in their laughter. For she had cheated them as they would have cheated her. She could afford to snap her fingers and laugh. She laughed aloud.

But as she dressed she began to know that she wished all the same that their message to her had been 'heads.' Need they, just then, have joked with her? Was not their joke a little ill-timed?

So despite her laughter and Abel's, for he too laughed, when, at breakfast, with a "So

much for the casting of lots!" she gaily thrust the postcard under his nose, it was not an entirely exultant Jane who found herself unable to settle to anything for wonder of what the day would bring forth.

So much for castings of lots? Could she really treat the message so lightly? The day would bring forth nothing? Was that what was meant by the uncompromising 'tails'? Or — dreadful thought! — were the gods warning her as she (albeit in her pride and her foolishness) had thought to warn Betty?

Let her, not Betty, beware of what the day or the days might bring forth? You did more than you knew when you appealed to the gods.

Nonsense! Nonsense! Abel had laughed too. He, knowing less than she of what the visit to Plas Llwyn had given her, had laughed, had seen nothing but cause for laughter in the perverseness of the issue. She took heart of grace.

But she could settle to nothing. She was indoors, out-of-doors, in the rooms, on the stairs, on the grass steps in the garden. She would sit down, and get up. Abel Tremlet had established himself with his newspapers in a shady nook which he had made his own at one end of the terraces. His tactfulness was exemplary — almost irritating. He did not appear to observe anything, and probably observed everything.

At eleven o'clock Miss Rod called, ostensibly to ask Miss Weston and Mr. Tremlet to tea, and to fix a day for that ceremony; actually, Jane knew, to hear whether her dear Miss Weston had called at Plas Llwyn. She did not at once enlighten her.

"Shall we say Monday?"

The day she proposed would suit Jane and her cousin as well as any other.

"That is delightful. Monday, then. I thought I would invite Mrs. Mount-Ross."

She looked at Jane with her little eyes in which the pupils were dots.

That, too, would be delightful, Jane said.

Miss Rod beamed.

"I know she would like to meet you, and it would be such a pleasure to me to introduce you to each other in my house."

"Oh, we met," Jane said, "yesterday. We called, Mr. Tremlet and I, coming back from Aberdovey."

"Ah," said Miss Rod, archly.

"Yes, we weren't dressed for visiting, but we called."

"I hoped you would," said Miss Rod. "The sooner the greater the compliment. It would have been a pity as you were so near, and, as I said, Mrs. Mount-Ross would be sure to understand."

"I think she did. She, by the way, wasn't 'dressed' either."

Miss Rod's expression implied that that was different. Great ladies, or ladies in great places, could afford to be found as they happened to be. But her interest and her curiosity were too urgent to allow her to risk a check by the display of any reserves. She beamed questions and comments. What she wanted chiefly to know was about the larger pieces of furniture. Whether they had been moved back? The piano?

"Perhaps you noticed, Miss Weston?"

Jane had not noticed. She appealed to her cousin. Mr. Tremlet unfortunately had not 'noticed,' either.

Ah, well, these things took time. The piano undoubtedly ought to stand where it had always stood. That, of course, was the one place for it. But wonders had been done as it was. Could one have believed, except for the packing-cases in the hall — they were still in the hall?— that a move had taken place at all, and that dear Mrs. Mount-Ross had not been at Plas Llwyn all her life?

Jane agreed that one could not have believed.

"And she fits in," Miss Rod said. "She fits in, doesn't she? I don't know if it struck you as it struck me."

That was what had chiefly struck Jane, but her reluctance to say so showed her suddenly

that she was behaving rather badly. Indirectly as it might be, she had to thank Miss Rod for the inestimable gift which had so miraculously been vouchsafed to her. The very least she could do in return was to concede to her the undisputed possession of Mrs. Mount-Ross, upon which, moreover, in virtue of her having called first, Miss Rod had established her claim.

"She *is* Plas Llwyn," Jane said — giving, when she gave, with both hands. "So is he. We thought them both perfectly charming."

She had her reward, not only in sending Miss Rod away happy, but in sending her away; for Miss Rod, satisfied, rose to go.

"I thought not a party. Just ourselves and Mrs. Vaughan Rees, perhaps, and Mrs. Mount-Ross and the Colonel. Should I ask Mr. Morgan, do you think?"

Jane thought Miss Rod should certainly ask Mr. Morgan.

"I thought so, too. Another gentleman for the Colonel. Gentlemen, I have noticed" — she looked at Mr. Tremlet quizzically — "gentlemen like each other's support on these occasions. In London I'm told they call such little festivities 'Bun-Worries.' 'Bun-Worries'!" She gave a little whoop of laughter.

"Ah, not Worries," Mr. Tremlet said, gallantly.

"And Miss Rod is famous for her cakes, Cousin Abel."

"I was sure of it."

A very happy Miss Rod fluttered by Jane's side down the grass steps to the lower gate. There she stood for a moment or two talking, repeating for the most part what she had said before.

"Not a party," she said, in fine; "I feel that for the first time, Mrs. Mount-Ross might prefer not a party. I think I ought to ask Mrs. Vaughan Rees, don't you? She shared the wagonette, you see. But otherwise not a party. Just ourselves."

"Monday, then. Thank you so much."

"Monday."

Miss Rod nodded two or three times, smiled with blinking eyelids, and was gone.

Jane turned back from the gate and met Ellen.

"Mr. Mount-Ross, 'm, would like to speak to you."

That was Ellen's formula for morning visitors. They were not announced. They would 'like to speak.'

"Mount-Ross?"

"Yes, 'm. He's in the drawing-room."

So complete, however, was the interruption which Miss Rod had made, that, actually, Jane was halfway up the steps before she

realised what it really was that Ellen had said to her.

She stood still.

"Mr. Mount-Ross?"

"Yes, 'm."

"Mister?"

"Yes, 'm."

Even then she had taken in no more than that Plas Llwyn, from which she had been awaiting a sign, had stirred. Peter had sent a messenger.

"But . . ." she said, and broke off. "But . . ." she said again. "And *he's* Colonel Mount-Ross!" She could still hear the unction with which Miss Rod spoke of 'The Colonel.'

She had not seemed to be speaking to Ellen. But Ellen answered.

"No, 'm, unless — yes, they've dropped all that, 'm, haven't they, since the War. I expect he's gone back to 'Mister.'"

Jane looked bewildered, almost frightened.

"You're sure you got the name right?"

"Why, yes, 'm."

A new thought.

"Is anyone with him?"

"No, 'm. Mr. Tremlet's reading the paper."

"I don't mean that," impatiently. "He came alone?"

"*Yes*, 'm!" For now Ellen was bewildered too. "His car's at the door."

But, at this point, Ellen's mistress became wholly incomprehensible. She gave a little breathless gasp. She stared at the astonished Ellen as if she had never seen her before, and, as she had lingered and hesitated, so, suddenly, she sped.

Ellen's eyes, round as half-crowns, followed her. She was running up the remaining steps, and it was somehow as if her feet did not touch them.

"Well, of all . . ."

Ellen went round to the stables and Anson.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT happened in the drawing-room, despite the age of a world which might have been supposed to have outgrown Romance and all kindred nonsense, was, to Jane, sheer, stark faëry. Not "Cinderella" itself in the fitting of the Little Glass Slipper reached climax more summarily; not "Beauty and the Beast" in the turning of Beast into Prince before Beauty's amazed and fascinated eyes. Jane, who, though she had Cinderella's foot, perhaps, and, once upon a time, like Cinderella, had fled, had dropped no slipper for remembrance or even identification; or who, in the flush even of her youth, had never aspired to be Beauty; could hardly believe what her own eyes — and her ears too — proclaimed to her.

Her eyes saw 'Peter' in her own drawing-room — incredible confirmation of the expected which, nevertheless, was the unexpectable! Her ears, more incredibly still, heard him telling her something the meaning of which seemed to be, when at last the sense of it reached her at all, that *he* had found *her*.

"You're not asking me to believe," she heard herself saying — and less than half a

minute after she had forced herself to enter the room — "you're not asking me to believe that you had been looking for me?"

But it was the manner of her entrance which had precipitated that. For though she had run to him on winged feet, as Ellen observed — passing Abel on the terrace without so much as seeing him — she had come to a pause, at the sight of the car on the drive, and to a full stop outside a door which she could not bring herself to open. It was touch-and-go then whether for a second time she might not take to her heels and so, temporarily, at least, once more have eluded him. If, after a sort of drowning effort to get control of herself, she had not swayed into the room — to find him on the other side of the door, waiting for her, watching it like a terrier, ears cocked for sounds — what happened might not have happened with such overwhelming rapidity. That it would have happened ultimately the evidences of her senses told her beyond all doubt or dispute. He was hers, as she knew that she was his, from the moment their eyes met and before the hand which she had once, but once only, touched, closed upon hers.

"You're not," she began again, "asking me to believe . . ."

But she knew that he was. And that was all

for some reeling moments or ages, during which they continued to look at each other.

"I'm not asking you to believe," he said at last, "that I've done nothing else. I'm not asking you to believe that there has been no other woman in my life." Things were galloping, indeed! "There have been dozens. We won't go into that." (Oh, won't we!) "I am asking you to believe that at the time I scoured Brighton for you, and that I've never forgotten you."

To Jane the import of the last five words, though they would have been true if she had used them to him — nay, because they would have been true if it had been she who had spoken them — was not less than stupendous.

"But you had seen me only once," she said.

"Well, you remembered me."

That was different. With her cloistered life to look back upon, Jane could appreciate how different. And, oh, it was different anyway. She was a woman. Women in themselves were 'different.' He was a man with God knew what experiences behind him. Yet he had remembered. It was stupefying.

So stupefying was it that Jane, as she stood before him, swayed again. For a moment or two, though she did not actually faint, as her grandmother, or his, would certainly have done, she lost some degree of consciousness.

When she came to herself, she was lying on the sofa, to which he must have carried her, and his arms were round her, supporting her, but not embracing her.

She let her eyes travel over his face, like the eyes of a very young child that examines at closest range the familiar face of its mother. She might have been tracing the features with a prospecting infantile finger. She lay quite still in his arms the while, as, for such rare moments, the child will lie, exploring, surveying. Her eyes, like the soft inquisitive finger, traced the lines of eyebrows, nose, chin; felt, rather than saw, the firmness of shaven cheeks and lips; touched the low broad forehead, not wholly unseamed, and the small close-set ears; stroked the hair that, though it was sown with grey which had certainly not been there in the far-off days of Brighton, was so thick and live-looking that, at the thought of a comb passing through it, you could almost hear and even see it crackle and spark; passed slowly down to the throat . . .

Afterwards Jane was to realise that, from the moment when she had entered the room, it was she, by actions and reactions which were nevertheless wholly involuntary, who had set the pace to all that happened. What happened now — what was done on the part of one of the two, the part, indeed, of both — was as

automatic and calculable as the action of the mother, who, wrought to a sort of ecstasy by the wandering of the tiny finger, first pretends to bite it, and then, with a rush of uncontrollable feeling, gathers her child to her heart. For, at a moment when if she stirred she was lost — no, if she stirred she was won? — more than that, far, far more; if she stirred she *had* won! — she was seized, half-swooning again, with a helpless shuddering trembling, and in the twinkling of an eye the support of the arms about her had become the inevitable embrace. Not Betty herself, arch *amoureuse* as she was (Mr. Tremlet defined her less politely), had ever come to grips with a lover more summarily.

But Jane — 'Miss Weston' still to Aberllwyn, friend, or at least friendly acquaintance, of Miss Rod of the Bank, of Miss Lewis who 'poured out' for her, of Mrs. Vaughan Rees who 'liked hers weak' and had 'shared the wagonette,' of Mr. Roberts who said '*fait accomply*' and spoke of '*ponce-nay*' — felt no shame. She had come into her kingdom and could cry quits to Ellen now; even to Betty.

"Someone I don't know . . ." she murmured when she could speak.

"Someone *I* feel I know, though I don't."

Ah, she, too, could have qualified what she had said.

He brushed the hand he was holding with his lips.

"I wonder," he said, "whether I could make you believe how truly I've never forgotten you, how often — and against my will too, sometimes! — I've thought of you. I fell in love with you at first sight, I think, but it wasn't only that. I don't pretend that in any ordinary circumstances you wouldn't have faded from my memory. It was exasperation primarily— no, not primarily, for if I hadn't loved you I shouldn't have been so exasperated, but it was the exasperation I felt when I searched Brighton for you that fixed your image in my mind so firmly that it has stayed there through the years. Oh, if you had wanted to keep me, you couldn't have hit upon a surer way. But you wanted to escape me . . ."

"I didn't!" Jane said. "I didn't!"

Tears were in her eyes, though she smiled. What did it matter now, what did anything matter? What would anything ever matter again?

"Tell me," she whispered. "Go on telling me."

"Yes, I'll tell you, for you ought to know what you had done to me and what you had made me suffer."

Perhaps that was the supreme moment after all — the moment in which she heard him say

that he too had suffered. For the novels in which one of the separated lovers said that she (it was generally the woman who spoke) could bear her own suffering if only she could have known that he was happy, were ludicrously astray. It was — and 'every time' as the phrase goes now! — 'I could bear it (my own suffering) if only I could know that he was not happy!' And so, when he told her that she had made him suffer, she was glad. Her tears might gather and fall as she listened, but in her heart she was glad.

"Why, I've tried to push you out of my mind," he was saying. "I've been angry with you. What right had you to haunt me? I've fought you. I've beaten you, too, scores of times . . . got rid of you for months together. I've made love to other women for you — nearly married some of them. I was engaged to one girl for two years. That was during the War, but it wasn't her face that I saw in the trenches. Yes, you don't know it, but you used to come to me there. Perhaps she got to know that I had cooled off or something, for she gave me the chuck all right. I wasn't sorry. But it was then that I ran amock a bit. It isn't only in heaven that there is no marrying or giving in marriage or question of marriage. You can buy what you want in this world all right. I haven't been ashamed of

that till this minute — no, till last night — *no*, till — tell me, was it you . . . at Henley?"

Jane nodded. She could not speak. Later, in the days that were to come, she could tell him how, deliberately, shamelessly, she had put out her hand to him that with her flesh she might touch him.

"I knew it. I didn't see. But I knew it. I scoured the river that night, as years ago I had scoured Brighton."

"As I had scoured London," Jane thought. "As I had set out to scour the world."

"Well, I came out of all that, not unscathed, perhaps, but at least I had revenged myself upon her — and, somehow, my dear, my dear, upon you. And then in 1918, just before the Armistice, I was wounded. Oh, not badly. I had the luck of what's called a charmed life in the War. But badly enough to have a couple of months in hospital. They brought me books when I was better. Old library books with Mudie's or Smith's labels. One of them was, what do you think? If, that is, you remember."

"If I remember . . ."

"Yes, 'Two on a Tower.'"

Oh, who shall say that no second kiss can equal the first? Jane was sobbing as she clung to him. She would never, if she lived to be a hundred, forget that there were tears in his eyes also.

"You see I had never," he said, "quite given up the idea that one day I should meet you."

He took her face in his two hands and looked into her eyes.

"Can you say that? Oh, say it," he said — "say it even if it isn't true."

"I can say it," she said. If she could not say that! She who had lived upon such a conviction for twelve years.

"Then at the beginning, why, why?"

"Panic. Sudden stupid headlong panic."

"You were afraid of me?"

"Because I knew I could love you. Think — Someone I'd never seen before. Brighton. The Pier. What you would think of me and what I should think of myself. I was ten times more afraid of myself. And under all that, deep down, I knew what I was rejecting. Oh, you would have pitied me if you could have known what it cost me. But you must have known *why* — you must! You did know why, didn't you?"

"Yes, and duly respected you. But that only showed me more clearly what I had lost. So you see . . ."

Oh, she saw.

He began to laugh, and laughed.

"Do you realize that even now I don't know your name? What *is* your name?"

"Jane."

"Jane," he said. "Couldn't be better. Jane, Jane. It couldn't be anything else."

But now that at last she was to learn his, she was frightened. It would be Peter, oh, it would be Peter . . . And the black menace of Betty would be upon her again, perhaps never to be withdrawn. Vain that in imagination she had fought her and was ready, if need be, to go to London or anywhere else and fight, fight, fight for her love which now was her very life. She would win, too — she had no doubt as to that — but for the rest of her days — day in and day out, as Betty had prophesied — she would go in fear of her, in deadly fear.

She unclasped his arms from about her and struggled to her feet.

"Before you tell me yours," she said, "tell me something else. Tell me: are you free?"

He was looking at her in mild surprise; half-smiling, waiting.

"What on earth . . ." he began to ask.

But she waved that aside.

"Are you free?"

"Of course I'm free. Certainly I'm free."

"What's your name, then?"

"John," he said. "John Mount-Ross."

"John?" She had nearly added, "You're sure?" Instead she repeated his words. "John. John Mount-Ross. You've no second name?"

"No."

There was a pause in which they considered each other. He made a little involuntary movement which bore witness, perhaps, to the strain upon his nerves, and he checked it.

"I can't guess what you've got in your mind," he said quietly. "I'm absolutely at sea. You must tell me. What have you been thinking?"

Jane was standing still as a stock or a stone, just looking at him. He stretched out his arms suddenly and drew her into them.

"You've been thinking I was someone else," he said, his cheek against hers. "Whoever you've been thinking I was, nothing's changed. I'm your lover. I'm your lover, Jane, without a thought in the world for anyone but you. You have me at your feet, don't you know that? Oh, your beautiful feet." He moved his head to look down at them. "Whatever my name is, or whatever the name you've been giving me, did you think I could ever forget them, or you?"

He drew her down once more on to the seat, and, without releasing her, sat beside her.

"Tell me now. Everything must be clear between us. You've had an idea at the back of your mind that there was some obstacle? There's none. Tell me."

"You'd better tell me. You've never been called — Peter?"

"Peter? No, I've never been called that."

"But you know Betty Tremlet."

She raised her head from his shoulder that she might see his face. No 'guilt' was there nor any self-consciousness, but his expression changed for all that.

"Do *you* know her?"

'My mother's name was Tremlet. Mr. Tremlet, who is my cousin and who came with me to Plas Llwyn yesterday, is Betty's father-in-law."

What John Mount-Ross's expression said then, and as plainly as if he had spoken, was "The Devil he is!"

It was manifest also that something that he would perhaps have said was made inadvisable by the information.

"Do you know her well?" he asked.

"I haven't known her long. But I know her pretty well."

"Well, I don't know her well," he began, when suddenly his face changed again. Her face had changed too. She was smiling, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Peter, did you say, Peter? You thought I was Peter? One moment. How did you know I knew Mrs. Tremlet at all?"

The explanation he asked involved an admission which hitherto she had withheld. But Jane was too happy now to care. She had gone

out to look for him. Very well, he should hear that she had gone out to look for him. Besides, she wanted to tell him. So she told him of her search which was to have been the search of the whole world if need had been; of what she called her street-walking, her peerings into the faces of passing strangers, her dancing lessons that if he danced she might meet him dancing, the hope and the apprehension with which she had scanned the faces in the theatres, shops, picture-galleries.

"And when you did see me I was with Mrs. Tremlet! Isn't that just what would happen! Good God! I met Mrs. Tremlet that night for the first time in my life."

Jane, who might well have supposed that there was no room left in her for surprise, leaned forward. It was not only she now who was excited.

"Good Lord!" he said. "Good Lord!"

But the milder exclamation was not strong enough for him and he reverted to "Good . . . *God!*" holding his breath with the first of the two words to release it, in a sort of explosion, with the second, and, even, though quite unconsciously, shaking her by the elbows as he did so. "I was no more than a stop-gap that night — deputising for her partner who had been called out of town! We were going on somewhere to dance — to some silly club. I

don't even remember where we went." In his heat he pulled her round almost roughly, that she might face him, more directly. "How much do you know of Mrs. Tremlet? You must forgive me — and she must too! — but how much do you know?"

It was a moment or two before Jane could speak, for in truth his vehemence — which she had yet found adorable! — took her breath away.

"She *would* forgive you. She'd even forgive me when I say that I know a good deal of what there is to know. There's something in Betty that is wonderful. Yes, I thought you were her . . . well, I thought you were Peter — though even then I didn't give you up. It wasn't till she told me — oh, if I'm breaking a confidence I'm obliged to break it! — that Peter, or, anyway, someone whom I supposed to be you, wanted to marry her, that I turned tail and left London. And even then . . ." She broke off. "Oh, what does it matter since you're not Peter? — Peter, I fancy, is a Mr. Harborough, but it doesn't matter now who he is."

"No. It doesn't matter. And at least" — he paused and smiled — "you took me for the best of — shall we say her 'Peters'? Martin Harborough, who is the particular 'Peter' that you seem to have heard of — for Peter *is* what

she calls him, and he's been dangling about her for months — is a friend of mine. I've known him since he was a boy. Very well. Do you know what my part has been in the whole damnable business? I've been moving heaven and earth to prevent him from marrying her."

But Jane, though her heart smote her, even as it leapt, did not defend nor attempt to defend herself. If she had 'thought,' and thought the worst, had she had any alternative? Given Betty, with what Betty stood for, given, pat upon what she had seen, the prattlings of Betty's little son to supply her with a name — at a moment, moreover, when every nerve in her body was on edge for a name! — had she been allowed any choice?

So, though at his words, as at the waving of a magician's wand, the whole bogey structure which she had raised crumbled and fell, showing her as its dusts dispersed the tragi-comic enormity of the injustice she had done him, she made no excuse for her blunderings. Someone had blundered. Someone had had to blunder. If apologies were due to anyone, they were due to herself and to Betty. They were due to Betty!

He was still speaking — more quietly now — telling her of his fruitless efforts to save his friend . . . winnowing the very dusts and destroying them. She had only to listen. She

had hardly even to listen. She ceased to listen, till something that he said with one last return to heat caught her wandering attention.

"If he marries her, I've only one thing to say, and that's God help *her!*"

She had a sudden vision of the baroque room and of Betty. It was what Betty, in other words, perhaps, had said herself! Well, that was Peter's affair . . . and after all might it not be, oh, surely it might be, that Betty, who was wise — wiser maybe in her generation than such Children of Light as Jane Weston, say, and John Mount-Ross, who, knowing nothing of each other, were ready apparently to take risks! — would be wise enough to take none? Anyway, Jane, at this moment, with the menace of Betty removed, was too happy to care. Betty, with Peter and the rest, must work out her own salvation. Jane had found her own lover and was free to take him. She laid her head on his shoulder and felt his lips on her hair.

Down to earth! Jane began to know that she was hungry. She had eaten no breakfast to speak of, and said so. It must be nearly luncheon-time, she thought.

"Yes, I'm staying to luncheon."

"Am I to consider myself engaged to you?"

"I think so!"

"Then come and be introduced to Cousin Abel."

Ellen was crossing the hall with a tray.

"We shall be three for luncheon."

"Yes, 'm."

Little minx!

As they were making their way to the terrace, he began to laugh.

"I'm wondering," he said, "how you're going to account for me!"

"Oh, you'll see."

He stopped laughing.

"No. Seriously. What are you going to say?"

"I tell you you'll hear."

"One moment. Stop, I beg of you. What's he like?"

"Wait and see."

"But, Jane, dear —"

"My good man" — over her shoulder, for he was hanging back. He was shy. He was actually shy! — "my good man, *will* you leave this to me!"

They were in sight of the bench now. Mr. Tremlet had put down his newspaper.

"This is Mr. Mount-Ross, whom I'm going to marry," she said. "I've spoken to him only once before in my life. I know scarcely more of him than you do."

Mr. Tremlet, bowing, said, "Quite so. That

is quite in order, I think" — and the two men who loved her shook hands.

But Jane, before she had turned away, sudden tears dimming her vision of a sight which she would never forget, had seen the thin-veined hand of the older man tighten its grip, tighten it deliberately, steadily, steadfastly, on the brown vigorous hand of the younger.

She recovered herself. Time enough for tears, howsoever happy. Time enough for tears, some of which must of necessity not be so happy, in the years that might be before her. One thing she promised herself. These particular tears she would have out that night — with the older arms about her.

THE END

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